

**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS**



00019394839





Class PZ.3

Book C8437

Copyright N<sup>o</sup> F

**COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.**

















CLAUDIA DANVILLE



# THE FRUIT OF FOLLY

BY  
VIOLET CRAIG

*"Frailty, thy name is woman!"*  
HAMLET

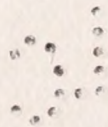


NEW YORK  
THE MACAULAY COMPANY  
1913



PZ 3  
C8437  
F

Copyright, 1913, by  
THE MACAULAY CO.



THE SCHILLING PRESS  
NEW YORK

\$1.25

©CL.A350640



# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I THE UNLOOKED-FOR KISS . . . . .	9
II HER HUSBAND'S WIFE . . . . .	35
III AWAKENING . . . . .	46
IV THE PRIMROSE PATH . . . . .	58
V THE IMPRESSIONABLE CRAWFORD . . . . .	82
VI THE DAWN OF LOVE . . . . .	105
VII A FOOL'S PARADISE . . . . .	146
VIII THREATENING CLOUDS . . . . .	155
IX LOVED AND LOST . . . . .	206
X YOUTH WILL BE SERVED . . . . .	216
XI THE WAY OF A MAN . . . . .	223
XII LOVE UNQUENCHED . . . . .	236
XIII A WOMAN'S FRAILTY . . . . .	241
XIV DISCOVERY . . . . .	249
XV ALL IN VAIN . . . . .	266
XVI THE RECKONING . . . . .	271







THE FRUIT OF FOLLY







# THE FRUIT OF FOLLY

## CHAPTER I

### THE UNLOOKED-FOR KISS

O love! O fire! once he drew  
With one long kiss my whole soul through  
My lips, as sunlight drinketh dew.

TENNYSON.

THE sun had disappeared; but the distant hills, the furthest clouds, still reflected a last dying gleam of rose, like a tender souvenir. Pale twilight was passing over the heavens, and suddenly, in the west, over a violet-capped mountain, there rose a deep red light, like the flames of a great fire in the distance.

Mrs. Danville trembled with indefinable agitation. She looked at Crawford, sitting by her side, and her lips parted, as though she were about to say something in a whisper. But his clear eyes were gazing into her own.



For a second she remained motionless. Then, softly, gently, without knowing why, she lowered her eyelids.

And she only gave a long sigh of consent when she felt the lips of Crawford quivering on her own, in a silent, instinctive kiss.

“To-morrow, at two o’clock, in the Chapel of the old Basilica!” he murmured, as he heard the footsteps of Danville, who was returning with his daughter, Louise. . . .  
“To-morrow, I beseech you! . . .”

. . . . .  
“What did I tell you?” cried Danville, pointing to the west, and indicating the great moon, which hung like a scarlet balloon between the violet mountain tops. “We shall be able to see as plainly as if it were daylight!”

Earlier in the afternoon of that autumn day the sky was clear and bright; September was changing the woods from green to gold and a light breeze fanned the foreheads of the passers-by, making walking a sheer delight.



Four people were strolling thus carelessly down a white, straight road, shaded by tall spruce trees. Behind them rose the spires and battlements of Quebec, like a dream-city in the azure distance; whilst before them lay the vista of the St. Lawrence Valley.

It was a Sunday. From time to time *habitants* passed the little group of four, clad in rustic costume.

“Bon jour! bon jour!” they said, in bold and sonorous accents.

And from nearly all the houses scattered along the roadside there rose a column of smoke, exhaling an odor of roast poultry or pork.

The four companions slowly wended their way down the road, chatting together gayly and light-heartedly. They were two men and two women, four well-dressed, enthusiastic New Yorkers, who had been roaming about Quebec for some days,—Louis Danville and his wife, Claudia, their daughter Louise, their friend Roger Crawford. Louis Danville was the junior member of a New York banking house; while Roger Crawford was the young



composer, already the possessor of a certain reputation, whose melody, "*The Song of the Roses*," had for the past two years charmed the hearts of young women endowed with beautiful forms, who like to display their emotions to the accompaniment of moving strains of music by the graceful rise and fall of an ample bosom.

These four companions of the road were not united by the bonds of old acquaintance. Their friendship was of quite recent date. Twenty-four hours before they had scarcely known each other. They had met in this way. On the lawn of the Château Frontenac, where she was strolling up and down with her husband and daughter, Claudia Danville had remarked the previous evening: "Louis, look at that dark young man who has just passed us!" Louis Danville had obeyed, and exclaimed:

"I know him! It is a man you danced with last winter!"

"Oh! yes, so it is!" Claudia had replied.

"Crandall, I think his name is."

"Crawford!" his wife corrected. "A



clever composer. Bow to him, Louis." And as the young man had turned his eyes in their direction, Mrs. Danville had bent her head with a welcoming smile, whilst her husband, with a friendly glance, had removed his hat, and Roger Crawford, surprised at his recognition, and unable to imagine who the unknown friends, encountered six hundred miles away from New York, could possibly be, went up to them with outstretched hand, a pleased expression, and a joyful gleam in his eyes. After a few commonplace remarks to jog refractory memories, they had strolled along the grass together for two or three hundred yards, discussing holidays, commerce, and art, and in the end the Danvilles had invited their new friend to lunch for the next day, Sunday. Crawford had accepted.

And after this lunch, which had been served in the Danvilles' own rooms by a servant they had brought with them from New York, Crawford, considering the sun was warm, his host a man of wit and intelligence, his hostess an exceedingly pretty woman, and the country attractive, had eagerly welcomed the sugges-



tion of a drive up the picturesque valley of the St. Lawrence.

They had started out with no fixed destination in view. But on the way Danville had boasted of his Canadian extraction — his great, great-grandfather, D'Anville by name, had been a colonel under General Montcalm — and to prove it he proposed that they should drive to Beauport, the village where his grandfather was born, and whose marvels he had long desired to point out to his family.

“Very well!” came the general assent. “Forward! Beauport let it be!”

For an hour they drove rapidly on, towards a round hill visible upon the horizon.

“It is there, just behind the hill! We should be there in twenty minutes!” said Danville. “The view is splendid from that point. Nothing in Eastern Canada can compare with that!”

Louis Danville was forty years of age. He was tall, fair, and strong. His grave voice had a noble accent, and loyalty shone forth from his clear eyes. He wore his hair close-cut, and his beard pointed; his skin was white,



his mouth red. He looked, perhaps, too mild not to be a little violent, and too skeptical, undoubtedly, not to be a little ingenuous, on occasion. To sum up, he looked a thoroughly good sort, one of those good fellows whom men are at once attracted to.

His wife, Claudia, was thirty-one. But it was necessary to see her daughter in order to believe it. Thanks to the animation in her eyes, the mobility of her features, the playfulness of her speech, and the suppleness of her movements, Claudia Danville looked as though she were still in her first youth, and she disconcerted her new friends when she confessed to more than twenty-five years. She was of medium height, and well made, though one had not always leisure to observe the fact. She was one of those women whose faces rob their figures, as it were, of the attention due to them.

In a man's eyes a woman possesses some center of attraction, which varies considerably. For one man it is her bust or her hips, for another her shoulders; very few find it in her face. But Claudia Danville happened to be



the very striking exception which proves the rule. It seemed impossible to take one's eyes off her head and face. The creamy complexion, and hair of darkest brown, were illumined by a wonderful pair of eyes, dull gold in hue, eyes which seemed the quintessence of the sun. The forehead was wide, and left quite bare, no artificial waves or curls broke its contour; the mouth, powerful and mobile, with no affected contraction of the lips; the chin, small and slender, forming two delicate curves. And from the whole face there emanated so subtle a gleam of intelligence and character that the rest of the body seemed plunged in shadow, and it sometimes needed long moments of observation before the exquisite lines of the snow-white throat and beautifully-molded bust were revealed.

Mrs. Danville had been married fifteen years, and the early blonde development of her daughter Louise, made the latter look like her little sister.

Roger Crawford, who was sitting with Mrs. Danville, was a most absolutely "correct" young man. He confessed to twenty-six or



twenty-seven years of age. Dark, slender, and self-composed, his gray eyes, full of mystery, invariably compelled the interest of women. He had the faculty of always looking exceedingly well-dressed, without appearing foppish. He had very dark hair, which was cut very short at the back, but was treated more leniently in front, and on his pale forehead there occasionally strayed a wavy lock of hair, which showed a discreet tendency to curl. His mustache was slight, and there was a red gleam in the carefully-pointed ends, and his powerful chin was destitute of any beard; his curved mouth was red and humid; whilst the square jaw, surmounting the vigorous neck, gave to his calm countenance a serene, triumphant charm, which was as disturbing to woman-kind as it was awe-inspiring to young men.

But the general impression produced by his peculiar physiognomy was that of perfect impassiveness. He spoke slowly, in a musical, childlike voice, which had a far-away melodious sound. His actions, too, were tranquil, his every gesture supple and premedi-



tated, full of indolent enjoyment; and it was perhaps in this apparent inertia, which gave him the victorious air of a worshiped idol, that the secret of his strength lay. He was one of those men of whom the more beautiful half of humanity thinks: "What a demigod!"

It was about half-past four. The sun was traveling slowly towards the south-west, between great banks of light clouds.

There was a sudden bend in the road, revealing, at the further end, the village of Beauport, half-green, half-gold, looking really beautiful with its rows of slender poplars, its picturesque, red-roofed dwellings, and its old church tower, whose tall black cross stood out against the clear sky.

"There it is," said Danville, with a proud smile.

And he indicated the scene with a sweep of the arm, as if he would take the little hamlet into his embrace.

"Let's go up to Montmorency Falls!" Danville exclaimed, and looked inquiringly at the others, who agreed.



Accordingly, they passed on until Beauport was left behind and they skirted an open stretch of field and woodland on either side. Toward the St. Lawrence, which lay broad and blue between them and the richly wooded Isle of Orleans, Danville pointed out a white mansion on a commanding point, just above the Montmorency Falls, which was once occupied by his forefathers.

Beyond the river and the Isle of Orleans the low, blue hills appeared, while before the eye and to the left rose the noble outlines of the Laurentian Mountains, flecked with passing gleams of soft light and violet shadow.

Crossing a shaky wooden bridge, beneath which the narrow river dashed itself over its rocky bed, and sang a fairy song as it flung itself onward toward the sea, the merry party drove a few hundred yards to a small country inn, where they alighted.

They walked on a little further along the road to the gate to the pathway leading to the Falls.

“This way!” cried Danville.

He waited for the composer, took him by



the arm, and explained the nature of his happiness:

“It was on this little mountain the family tree of Danville grew, my dear sir; that should enable you to understand my enthusiasm.”

And he went on to relate how his ancestor who had fought under Montcalm had settled there and grown rich after fifty years of stubborn toil.

He looked at his wife, who was walking beside him again, and Claudia gave him a very tender smile, and a very sweet and gentle look, charged with emotion. And Crawford, surprising both look and smile, concluded that the pair adored each other, and acquired the conviction that some few privileged beings exist in this world for whom fifteen years of union have not entirely exhausted the treasures of love.

“Admire my beautiful fellow-countrywomen, Mr. Crawford!”

Danville indicated a group of sunburnt girls, whose gayly colored skirts flickered amidst the foliage.

Just then, in the distance, a rudimentary



orchestra struck up a polka, and Danville understood now why it was that all along the road they had traversed most of the houses had exhaled such a violent odor of good cheer.

“Why, it’s the feast of St. Michael!” he said. “Seognac, the neighboring town, is celebrating the feast of its patron saint. For three days half the *habitants* are drunk, and three-quarters of the women-kind are demented. The baptismal fonts won’t be lying idle in another year’s time!”

“But it is disgraceful, horrible!” said his wife. “What an idea to bring civilized people to such places!”

Other groups of girls appeared, marking the vast wooded hill with splashes of color—red, blue, and yellow. They wore coquettish silk ribbons in their hair, and their ample skirts, straight and simply cut, their old-fashioned bodices, quite free of any useless ornament or dishonest padding, revealed right loyally their flat hips, thick waists, and bosoms.

Here and there groups of young men knocked up against them, the shock making the girls shriek with joy. Occasionally the



groups of boys and girls stood still; then intermingled, and with no signs of mock modesty, some of the excited girls moved off, leaning against their great courting louts, whose eyes were alight with strange, suspicious gleams. And prolonged shouts rose from the thick bushes, those triumphant shouts which are only heard on the lips of peasant folk, which are a sort of human neighing, very strange and abandoned, like the conqueror's flourish of triumph.

Claudia had never heard such shouts, but something in the depths of her being revealed their significance, and with crimsoning cheeks, she grew alarmed for Louise, and asked her husband:

“ Could we not find some means of avoiding this spectacle? ”

Danville felt constrained to defend his compatriots. “ They were such good souls, so hard-working and austere, and for three hundred and sixty-two days of the year their lot was such a hard one.”

Wine and pleasure filled the very air. The noisy, chattering laborers were drinking



heavily, swearing loudly, and hurling vulgar epithets at one another. Beneath the trees some wrinkled old men were solemnly emptying, with trembling elbows, their bottle of high-wine, as the *habitant* terms his favorite fiery tippie. With half-closed eyes and almost speechless, they were going into raptures over their intoxication, and drinking enough in this one day to satisfy their twelve months' thirst.

Suddenly, round a turn in the path, Mrs. Danville almost stumbled over a young girl, who was kissing a man full on the mouth.

Claudia drew back in disgust.

"By the soul of my body!" exclaimed the country girl, with a loud laugh. "She ought to be so mighty particular, the pretty doll with her two pretty men!"

But Danville all at once changed the route, and left the narrow, winding pathway, with its stream of *habitants* dressed in their Sunday best.

"Let us cut across here," he said, pointing the way. "We shan't meet anyone, and we shall get there just as soon."



“Are you sure we can reach it that way?” remarked Crawford.

“Oh! I know the mountain as well as my own hand!”

And the immaculate shoes had to contend with sharp, jagged rocks, and the dainty skirts became entangled in masses of hostile thorns.

“What a serious pleasure party we are!” said Claudia, as her delicate feet came in too close contact with the sharp stones.

And she began to struggle with the brambles which were threatening ruin to her dainty coiffure.

But after they had walked on for another thirty yards or so, they could not, for very shame, have turned back. And so they continued the ascent.

Now and then they caught a glimpse of slender, snowy streams of foam descending over the dark, rocky precipice. Those were the outlying stragglers of the great Fall, and as beautiful in themselves, as some Swiss cascades, one of them looking like braided threads of molten silver as it fell over the jutting rocks.



Soon they came out upon the bank, fringed with hemlock, spruce and wild flowers, from the top of which a flight of wooden stairs led down. And there the main Fall hung in full view, as it made a sheer plunge down the precipice, a mass of snowy foam in mad, headlong rush.

“Look! Oh! look Claudia!” exclaimed Danville.

With eager gesture he pointed to the trees, the rocks, the flowers, the whole landscape. He experienced an infinite sense of delight in this excursion. He had long been promising himself this intimate joy, this bliss of wandering over the soil he loved, of visiting the scenes which had so many tender associations for him. One of the greatest joys that lovers may experience consists in showing each other the scenes amidst which they once lived before meeting the beloved. During the last fifteen years Danville had never managed to find time to take his wife to this romantic region, and his voice quivered as he indicated well-remembered landmarks, named the different villages, made them familiar with the plants and



wild flowers which grew in such luxuriant profusion, and pointed out the various houses. All that he encountered on this hillside possessed for him an almost fraternal tenderness of association, and he experienced a profound sense of happiness at the sight of a familiar rock or tree. He walked on rapidly, climbing higher, dragging Louise along with him, whilst Crawford offered his arm to Claudia, when the way became more difficult than usual. And Danville went into endless raptures, with the artless candor of a child, with words of deep emotion for his native land ever on his lips, with adoration ever in his eyes for whatsoever grew thereon.

And he involuntarily communicated his enthusiasm to his companions. They grew quite excited over the scenery. "Marvelous!" became the unanimous and oft-repeated verdict.

Claudia's cheeks were flushed with pleasure, her eyes shone. The hard walking quickened the adorable rhythmic rise and fall of her bosom. The starlike eyes of Roger Crawford occasionally forgot to admire the beauties of the landscape. Louise gathered wild flowers,



and her father toiled on indefatigably, throwing out occasionally precious information to the tourists, such as:—

“Take care! Mind that rock!”

Or:—

“Put your foot on that root! Cross this stream just here!”

The sun was setting and seemed to shed a rosy veil over the joyous forest beneath. Claudia Danville's eyelids drooped occasionally upon her dazzled eyes.

Here and there were enchanting little nooks, and poplar dells, the straight branches with the autumn-yellow leaves pointing upwards to the sky like tall golden spires.

And whilst Mrs. Danville gazed and marveled and uttered exclamations of admiration, she was no doubt telling herself that she was a very happy and a very fortunate woman, that life certainly has its delightful moments, and that Louise was a pretty little girl of whom she might well be proud, that Louis was a very exceptional husband, tender, devoted, and good.

And she thought of her friends in New



York, who were jealous of her from their very souls. And she told herself, too, that upon this particular day, at all events, they had every reason to be envious of her.

In all probability these were the subtle elements which entered into that state of languorous felicity that Claudia Danville experienced as she looked at the trees and rocks, as she listened to the murmur of the streams, as she felt the warm glow of the sun upon her shoulders.

And having reached a spot that was literally carpeted with sweet wild flowers, she stooped to gather some; then fastened one into her husband's buttonhole, and another into Crawford's; then she kissed Louise on both her fresh young cheeks, and that for no plausible reason, and without any explanation, though no one was surprised by the impulsive, and in Claudia Danville, most unaccountable action; for at such a time and in such a place she might have begun to sing, or to play hide-and-seek, or to look for nests in the trees, or to do anything else, either foolish or unusual, and no one would have been shocked,—everything



would have been considered perfectly logical and natural.

There is an intoxication in Nature which has touched even the coldest heart at least once during its lifetime; and there are ways of speaking, of acting, of loving, which are quite simple and natural beneath the setting sun or at the foot of a silent beech, but which would be considered absurd in a drawing-room beneath the shades of palms in costly art pots.

Meanwhile, the ascent was becoming more and more difficult, until at last it seemed well-nigh impossible to advance another step.

But Danville would not hear of their giving it up.

“We shall be at the top before sunset,” he promised them, “and we will return by the road. I think it will be full moon to-night, and when we drive back to the city it will be as light as day. We shall dine at half-past seven, as usual, and have a rather better appetite, that is all!”

All the same, in spite of his high enthusiasm, he was very glad of Crawford's helping hand now and again, for he was getting



tired, and the young *maestro's* cool energy seemed exhaustless.

Claudia shuddered as she watched the rapid setting of the sun. Perhaps these wooded dells were haunted by wild beasts! Already she had uttered a startled cry upon discovering a small snake between two stones. And she had nervously grasped Crawford's hand when he came to her aid.

The young man now seemed to have become responsible for the transport of the whole family. He first climbed up alone, helping himself with his cane, and explored the neighborhood. When he had discovered a square yard of favorable ground, where it was possible to stand in something approaching an upright position, he returned to his companions, and then came to the aid, first of Louise, then of her mother, and finally of Danville himself, who wiped his forehead with an intrepid gesture, crying enthusiastically: —

“Heavens! Isn't it just magnificent here? Isn't it splendid?”

“Superb!” declared Crawford, who was exploring a little further on.



He carried abundant proof of masculine strength, of incredible skill, and indefatigable devotion. He made a descent of fifteen yards to recover Louise's sunshade, which had slipped from her hand; and he lacerated one of his hands in grasping a thorny bush to prevent Claudia from losing her balance.

"Victory!" shouted the husband. "Here we are at last!"

And every face was illumined with joy.

At that moment Claudia uttered a long exclamation of enthusiasm.

"Oh! look, look!" she said.

And her eyes grew wide with boundless admiration.

At their feet stretched the endless rolling plain, bathed in a rose and purple haze, and the evening light seemed to cover it with incense. And between two gigantic black rocks the St. Lawrence appeared in the distance, whilst the sun sank into it as into a huge purple bath.

For a long moment the four travelers stood motionless, their lips parted in contemplation and surprise.



"Let us hurry," said Danville, his voice quite husky with emotion.

A few more steps brought them to a little pebbly road terminating in an impasse on the steep edge of the hill, at the end of which a square stone did duty for a rustic bench.

He led his companions to this stone, and, laying his hands on his wife's shoulders gently, he made her turn round.

"Look!" he said, his lips trembling with pride, "Look!"

Claudia obeyed, and over towards the north she saw the long chain of the Laurentians, which raised to the magnificent azure of the heavens a vast monotony of orange crests.

The sun was setting. Its red disc sank down upon the distant water, and at this fugitive contact of river and sky, a mass of clouds, vermilion in hue, seemed to soar towards the sky like a strange, fantastic vapor.

"Let us go to the tower," said Danville. "We can go in and climb to the top, and from there the view will be still more beautiful."

As he spoke, he started toward the rude stone



tower, which lay hidden in the shadow of a giant beech.

"I am quite tired out! I can't walk another step!" declared Claudia. "You can come and look for me here when you are ready," she said, as she sank down upon the stone seat.

Danville went off with Louise and Crawford sat down by Claudia's side. But the latter did not appear to notice the fact. She was quite drowsy with fatigue. A strange, indefinable giddiness seemed to have overtaken her, both in body and soul. She gazed at the river, at the mountains, at the clouds, without a word. The air seemed different on this grass-grown height; never had her lungs been filled with air so sweet, so rare. Below her, where the white road lay, little black specks were visible, which were really men. And in the nearer distance those forms walking together, two by two, down the paths of the hillside, were boys and girls whose manners had so shocked her an hour ago. And Claudia did not feel in the least surprised at the sight



of these furtive couples. She saw humanity in a different perspective, as it were, from this altitude, she looked upon them all with eyes soft with generous sympathy.

She experienced a thousand strange, indefinable sensations. She was both very happy, and very sad. Somewhere within her being sentiments hitherto unknown were born, sentiments which in a vague way she felt she would never have known had she remained down there, in the valley, on the same level as other women. She was not quite sure whether she was entirely the same person; a new heart seemed to have entered her body; these trees, this caressing breeze, had filled her with a confused, mysterious sensation of indefinable hope and inexplicable felicity.

Then came Crawford's kiss, clinging upon her answering lips.



## CHAPTER II

### HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

Such duty as the subject owes the prince,  
Even such a woman oweth to her husband.

*The Taming of the Shrew.*

CLAUDIA DANVILLE had never deceived her husband. She was a scrupulously virtuous woman, who would have remained faithful to the wifely vows through a sense of duty, if not through love.

Her parents had brought her up most austere. She had seldom had any but very old governesses, and very young girl friends, in order that she might not receive bad examples from the former, nor dangerous confidences from the latter. Her education had been supervised by the high-church rector of St. Paul's, who was her great-uncle on the maternal side. Indeed, Claudia did not enter society until after her marriage.



She lost her father when she was four years of age; at fifteen she lost her mother. It was partly on this account that she had been married, at sixteen, to Louis Danville, to whom the defunct mamma had bestowed her daughter.

In those days Claudia was very religious. Every week she went to her great-uncle to confess; and she often thought of the sharp reply the good man had once made to a young girl: —

“You do not believe in God? So much the worse for your future husband!”

After a few years of married life, however, Claudia herself did not believe so very much in the good God of her childhood. She no longer went to Communion, save once a year; she did not go to Mass every Sunday; and at last, having spent a long winter season abroad, she forgot to present herself at the Easter examination of consciences; and since that time she had given it up altogether. But she still made a practice of attending the service occasionally, the days of pomp and ceremony, to listen to the swell of the organ, and inhale the perfume of the incense, to admire the priests in



their resplendent robes, and above all to study the toilettes of certain aristocratic ladies.

Nevertheless, Danville never had any reason to complain. The good rector of St. Paul's had been mistaken.

For fifteen years Claudia cherished a constant and exclusive love for her husband. No doubt the love yearnings of the first days had been satisfied, the fleeting curiosity of the senses had vanished forever. But in her heart there still remained the same faithful ardor; and no man, handsome or young, celebrated or powerful, whom she might happen to encounter, ever aroused in her even a passing thought.

Very few men, moreover, had ever paid her really serious court.

There is a sort of negative electricity, as it were, between virtuous people; and it might be safely said that women, no matter how beautiful they may be, have no adorers save when they themselves wish to have them, and encourage their attentions.

So Claudia displayed her pretty shoulders in society like the rest of the women, and



danced freely and light-heartedly with the men.

“She is lovely!” the men said sometimes among themselves. But they never dared say as much to Claudia herself.

The most heroic conquerors do not undertake improbable victories; and a lackey must be a Spaniard, at least, to venture to fall in love with a queen. Therefore Mrs. Danville displayed her white throat and shoulders with impunity, for virtue protects far more effectually than even ugliness.

For her husband she had the most profound gratitude. Married so young, she had never known another lover, and Louis Danville had been the splendid realization of her heart's first desire. As she was quite a novice, and completely pure, in mind as well as in body, her love had but increased during the first two years of her married life. It might almost be said that she had been a mother before she realized she was a lover. And the memory of that blissful period was so sweet that it seemed as though its fragrance must perfume the rest of her days.



For nearly ten years she had never been able to let her husband leave the house without going on to the balcony with a field-glass that she might follow his carriage longer with her eyes. And Louis loved her well for these things.

By reason of her severe upbringing she had long retained an excessive sense of shame. She declined to read a book containing a passionate love story, and was naïvely shocked at the idea of married women carrying on flirtations.

. . . . .

When she returned to the hotel on that Sunday evening, after the excursion to the Falls, she shut herself up in her room, and, pleading indisposition, she left her husband and daughter to take a stroll about the town with Crawford.

Her lips were on fire. Could it be that a man had kissed her? Could it be that she had not instantly darted back at the contact of those insolent lips? How could it be that for a mere nothing — a murmur of the wind, a kiss of the sun, a hum of insects — a woman



could forget in a single instant fifteen years of virtue?

She wept. They were tears of vexation. She began to reason. It was the trees that had been responsible — the trees, the mountains, the wind, everything! Everything except herself! It was the effect of her environment, the fatality of the time and place. Never before had she experienced a similar sense of exaltation; never had twilight filled her heart with such an indefinable tenderness. In that strange moment on that evil hillside, that moment when she received that kiss, any catastrophe might have befallen Claudia Danville, and she would not have deigned to notice it.

The ground might have opened beneath her feet, and she would not have uttered a cry. Admiration, fatigue, happiness, had played too effectually upon her nerves. Perhaps she had let that kiss fall upon her mouth as she would have let the rain fall upon her shoulders, without dreaming of flight, without caring, without the slightest feeling of alarm. Was the thing so very important after all?



But as she became plunged in these reflections Claudia despised herself. She recalled the ugly, brutal truth. She had seen that kiss coming; she had received it in all consciousness, and her lips had parted as if her soul would have drunk it up.

“I was mad!” she said aloud. “I was not myself!”

She paced rapidly up and down her room.

“Ah! now I have recovered my self-control!”

And as the lover's supplication seemed once more to be ringing in her ears, she heard the words: —

“To-morrow, at two o'clock, in the Chapel of the Basilica,” she murmured silently: —

“Never!”

Danville returned. As soon as she heard his step upon the stairs, Claudia walked to the door. And she held up her face for his kiss — not her cheeks, nor her forehead, but her lips, her ardent lips, feeling they needed purifying.

And only after that kiss did she permit herself to embrace Louise, who had entered be-



hind her father, her cheeks aglow with the walk in the fresh, sweet air, her hands occupied with a roll of white paper.

“Are you better now?” asked Danville, laying down his hat.

And then immediately he began to speak of the composer, saying:

“What a charming fellow! You know, we have just been to see him! He insisted absolutely upon our seeing his room in the hotel near by. He is really a most charming fellow!”

Louise broke in at this juncture:

“Oh! by the way, Mamma, this is for you.”

And the young girl handed her the roll of paper.

Claudia unrolled it. It was a copy of the “*Song of the Roses*,” Roger Crawford’s well-known melody. Beneath the title the composer had written:—

“To Mrs. Danville, in memory of Sunday, September 29th.”

The signature was written in bold, upright characters. The hand that had held the pen had not trembled.



Claudia laid the piece of music on a side table.

There was a piano in the principal room of the apartment the Danvilles occupied in the hotel, and Louis turned to his wife saying: "Suppose you play us this '*Song of the Roses*,'" and placed a chair on either side of the music-stool, one for Louise, the other for himself. But as he was opening the piano, Claudia declared that she did not feel in the least like playing.

Danville turned to his daughter and said: "Will you try it through for me, Louise?" laying the open sheet on the music-rest.

Just at that moment Claudia was in the little room adjoining, which she had converted into a dressing-room, but scarcely had she heard the first few bars of the "*Song of the Roses*" before she slipped back and went over to Louise saying:

"Oh, no! Don't play that, please!" And rather too abruptly she snatched Crawford's melody from its place on the piano.

"What is the matter with you to-night?" asked Louis.



“Oh! nothing; only a headache. The piano would get on my nerves.”

And Claudia threw a smile at her husband, looking meanwhile perfectly composed.

Of course they sometimes had their little tiffs, like all susceptible lovers who are very much in love with each other; and they put in practice the precept contained in the famous Indian poem, which declares: “People must quarrel, for the same reason that meat is salted.” But on this occasion Danville did not insist. He thought his wife was really ill, and he settled down to write a few business letters before going to bed.

Half an hour later, Claudia, who was already in bed, doing her best to get to sleep, saw her husband leave his chair, take up the “*Song of the Roses*,” cross over to the lamp, and, beating time with his foot, heard him whistle between his teeth the air composed by Roger Crawford.

“Idiot!” thought his wife. “It would serve you right if —”

But a few moments later she felt a pang of remorse, for she saw her husband — her good



Louis — take a flower out of his buttonhole — the little wild flower that Claudia had placed there, on the hill of Montmorency, and carefully deposit this little souvenir in his pocket-book



## CHAPTER III

### AWAKENING

Perhaps 'tis pretty to force together  
Thoughts so all unlike each other;  
To mutter and mock a broken charm,  
To dally with wrong that does no harm.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

CLAUDIA DANVILLE slept badly that night. She could not explain the reason for her sleeplessness. She did not care to believe that Crawford could possibly disturb her repose. She assured herself it was because of all the different clocks in the town, which had been making an extraordinary din for the last few moments. That of the Basilica in particular, which she thought she recognized, amazed her exceedingly. Claudia heard midnight striking several times, and one o'clock several times, and two o'clock an incredible number of times. And she could not help reflecting



that when these clocks struck two again . . . two o'clock in the afternoon. . . .

"Ah!" she said, almost aloud, "I hope he thinks I am going!"

Louis woke up.

She did not stir, but made her breathing calmer and more regular, and pretended to be asleep.

Only with the approach of dawn did her eyelids really close in slumber, a weary, heavy slumber, in which she was continually commencing and re-commencing the ascent of the day before.

And when she rose she wanted to open the shutters, even before she dressed, to look into the street below; she did not dare to admit to herself that it was only the spire of the Basilica that attracted her gaze, which was just visible above the roof of another building.

And she fretted and fumed over the blue gown which had suffered so severely from yesterday's struggle with thorny bushes, over the dust-laden petticoats, the down-at-heel shoes; over everything she had worn the previous day, which seemed to have reappeared only



to remind her mockingly of that miserable excursion. She scolded the maid, who slept in the next room.

“Anna, why haven’t you brushed my clothes?”

It was only seven o’clock, and Louis awoke with a start.

The morning which had just commenced seemed abominably long. Not far from the hotel could be heard the continual rumbling of carts and carriages and omnibuses, accompanied by a clamor of bells. And the cup of coffee Anna brought her tasted like medicine.

“The devil! I don’t know whether Crawford is still tired — but I! . . .”

These were the first words Louis uttered when he awoke, with a prodigious yawn.

Claudia could have slapped his face.

She was not a good actress, and was unpracticed in the art of concealing her emotions. Being very quick to feel, and feeling much, and very strongly, she was unable to control her nerves. Hers was not the nature to don a mask and continue to wear it at pleasure. Very often it was as though events pulled a



series of wires in her body and forced her to make mechanical gestures; and perhaps the greatest charm in her charming countenance was due to this spontaneity of expression.

Louis being as quick to read as his wife to betray, asked:

“Are you still feeling tired from our tramp?”

She looked at her husband. Why did every word he uttered recall Crawford?

Intensely irritated, she made up her mind to go out. She dressed quickly, choosing a very elegant costume, kissed Louise three or four times over, and hurried off with her downstairs.

“Where are we going, Mamma?”

“I don’t know,” she replied.

And once outside the hotel, she walked with rapid steps, obsessed by a feverish longing for excitement.

At a certain moment Louise raised her pretty fair head as if in search of something.

“What are you looking at?”

“I am looking to see if Mr. Crawford is at his window.”



“Is he staying here?”

“Yes. That must be his window over there. That one in the corner, on the third floor.”

“Oh!”

After a brief hesitation, she herself glanced in the direction of that window in the corner, on the third floor, and saw that there was no one in sight.

“Has he a nice room?”

“What did you say, Mamma?”

But Claudia, almost blushing, did not dare to repeat her question. Instead, she asked her daughter to admire some flowers which a market-woman was pushing along in a little cart.

And the tower of the Basilica, visible whichever way they turned, again offended her weary eyes.

Suddenly she turned pale. A young man was walking towards them, a dark, slender young man.

“Oh!” said Claudia, with a slight accent of disappointment.

“What is the matter?”

She did not reply at once. Then, with a smile, she murmured:—



“Oh! how silly I am. I thought I recognized . . . someone.”

They were out a long time, visiting the old town and the fortifications. Claudia appeared to be enjoying herself immensely. And just at the moment when she was apparently taking an intense interest in everything she was saying to herself: —

“Goodness! How difficult it is to find any form of distraction!”

She bought several newspapers, and on returning to the hotel endeavored to read them. But the letters danced up and down before her eyes.

She ate nothing but a few grapes at lunch. And when the clock struck one, and then the half-hour, she suddenly rose, and laid her arms about her husband's neck: —

“Let's go for a walk, shall we?”

“Of course. At once, if you like. I shall enjoy it.”

And as they went out together, he asked affectionately: —

“Where would you like to go, dear?”

“I don't mind. Somewhere a long way off.



Let's go to some of the shops, and then to the Plains of Abraham."

"All right!" Danville answered, and drew out his watch.

Then, without a quiver in her voice, slightly lowering her eyes to pin a flower into the bosom of her gown, Claudia asked: —

"What time is it?"

"Ten minutes to two."

The young wife was conscious of a delightful thrill of excitement. She made no attempt, on Fabrique Street, to discover whether a dark young man was walking in the direction of the chapel.

She really enjoyed herself that afternoon, without any pretense. At first she walked along slowly, looking in the shop windows. And then, after a time, they drove out to the old battle ground. Louis had brought a field glass. They tried to discover panoramic marvels. And Claudia was enchanted to find that she could discern quite distinctly the iron weather-cock perched on the summit of the stone tower of Montmorency.



“ See if you can, too! ” she said to her husband.

Danville saw nothing. And though she was a little unnerved, Claudia experienced a really delightful sensation, as it is always very sweet for a woman to play with two men at once, even when she is absolutely indifferent to one of these men, and adores the other with all her heart.

As she climbed up the grassy slope of the old fortifications, Claudia was a prey to an agreeable sense of anxiety; her husband gave her his hand in the most dangerous or difficult spots, and he doubtless could not help remembering that Crawford had performed a similar service the previous day at the Falls. Three times Louis came to her aid, but not once did he mention the composer's name! And Claudia — was it disappointment? — unconsciously resented the fact. She took no interest in the historical facts related by her husband, which Danville told off in learned fashion.

They dined at a small inn. Mrs. Danville



had an excellent appetite, and it was nine o'clock before they returned to the hotel.

As her husband was collecting the letters that had arrived by the last post, Claudia turned to the porter: —

“No one has called?” she asked.

“No, Madam.”

She frowned slightly.

And to the chambermaid she said, as soon as the door was open:

“Did no one ring this afternoon?”

“No one, Madam.”

“You are quite sure? . . . About three o'clock?”

“Were you expecting anyone, then?” asked Louis.

“I? No.” But almost as she spoke a ring was heard, and she was quite excited.

“Ah! It is you, Crawford,” cried Danville joyously. “Please come in.”

And Claudia uttered an almost natural exclamation of surprise as she offered the young man her little trembling hand.

Crawford bowed to Mrs. Danville with a



look of quiet pleasure on his face; his handshake was very cordial, his glance very ordinary and conventional, and quite respectful. He explained the reason of his visit with well-bred ease, whilst he took possession of the chair Danville had indicated. As he was passing, he thought he would come to bid them "good evening." And he smiled pleasantly as he talked over the excursion of the previous day. He was quite willing to talk over current topics with Louis, made a few intelligent observations, touched upon a Wagnerian question, discreetly hummed over two bars of "*Parsifal*" to give weight to one of his arguments and altogether appeared to be in the best of health and spirits.

Claudia was dumbfounded. She could not understand. She felt quite unable to interest herself in the conversation. She cast furtive, disconcerted glances in the direction of Crawford. Had she perchance dreamed it all? If not, what man was that? What! not even with his eyes did he convey a reproach to her! Not even by one of those mad handclasps which all



properly conducted lovers indulge in, which are doubtless so sweet to the hearts of sensitive women!

The composer got ready to go. Claudia had scarcely had time to remove her hat.

"Shall we go out for a few moments?" asked Louis.

Out of politeness she replied: "Certainly."

And they got ready to take the composer back to his hotel.

It was a beautiful evening. The breeze was steeped in the fragrance of the evergreens of the north country. All four sat down for a moment on the terrace chairs; then Danville suggested taking a walk. Claudia was tired. Out of politeness she did not say anything, but she lagged a little way behind. Crawford was speaking to her of Mozart. Danville and his daughter were discussing the name of a large white star.

Claudia could not find a word to say.

At a bend in the pathway, Crawford said, in a very gentle voice: —

"You did not come to-day? I love you



dearly. I will wait for you to-morrow, and every day, at the same time, and at the same place."

"Claudia, is it not Sirius?" asked Danville, as he turned round towards his wife.

Claudia could not reply.

But Crawford possessed some knowledge of astronomy.

"Oh, no," he said, in his child-like, musical voice. "It should rather be Jupiter, should it not? And that little pink star beside it must be Mars. Is it not, Mrs. Danville?"

And very low, with a long look from his deep gray eyes, he murmured:—

"Until to-morrow!"



## CHAPTER IV

### THE PRIMROSE PATH

What a strange thing is man! and what a stranger  
Is woman!

LORD BYRON.

“SUPPOSE I tell my husband all?” thought Claudia, with a tremor of indignation.

But what would be the use of disturbing Louis' peace of mind with vain alarms? Why employ such extravagant means? Would it not be admitted that Crawford was dangerous? She certainly did not desire to confer upon the personage in question such an honor as that. And she entered the hotel in a state of violent excitement.

Her dignity was wounded.

“Why is he treating me like this? Why is he more impertinent than other men? Is he blind? Or is it I who am blind?”

But she speedily reassured herself. “No!



I am sure of my own heart. This man is nothing to me; and that utterly unlooked-for kiss I gave him was given to the mountains, to the trees, to the sky, perhaps to God — but not to a man.”

This pretty reasoning restored her peace of mind. She had walked back to the hotel without knowing where she was going, lost in thoughts. Twice her husband had spoken to her without her having heard him. But she went to bed with her heart at rest, and was almost at once sound asleep.

The next morning she noticed that the exit from the hotel where Crawford was staying was visible from Louise's room.

And, having made this discovery, she noticed also that the table in this same room was a mass of litter; earrings lying about on a book, a heavy illustrated periodical had been thrown on to some fragile books, whilst the petals of a faded bouquet had fallen upon some delicate laces. She put everything in order again, and the task took her a whole hour; and if she often glanced at the doorway of Crawford's hotel during that hour, it was only nat-



ural, because there was no other architectural marvel visible from the window.

Besides, Mrs. Danville was perfectly calm; she could think of all sorts of things, she could have found the answer to a riddle if one had been placed before her. And if she had been incessantly humming, since the previous evening, a certain *motif* from "*Parsifal*," recalled to her memory by Crawford, it was because she liked that particular *motif* so much.

There were many knocks at the door of the suite, and Claudia's heart beat unaccountably fast after each knock, which exasperated her. And the title of the "*Song of the Roses*," which Louise had left on the piano, seemed to dance up and down before her eyes, which disturbed her greatly. And finally, the chair Crawford had occupied, that ordinary common-place easy-chair of a hotel room, whose coarse white antimacassar had been disarranged by the composer's hand, made her extremely agitated.

At last, unable to contain herself any longer, she pushed the horrible piece of furniture into the most obscure corner of the room, she



crumpled up the sentimental melody and threw it into the most dusty drawer she could find.

“Well! yes! I do think about that man — think about him constantly,” she confessed to herself, “as one thinks about the rain falling! Does that mean one loves the rain?”

She did not want to go out that day. She admitted that she was not well, and strongly recommended Louis to take Louise for a drive.

At one o'clock, dressed in an exquisite morning-gown, whose loose sleeves revealed the pretty bare arms to the elbow, she went to her daughter's room, took up her watch with one hand, her lorgnette with the other, and, with a very joyful mien installed herself in the window to examine all the daring slim young men who might be leaving the entrance to Crawford's hotel.

She thought the situation rather funny, and she promised herself a hearty laugh.

She soon grew tired of standing, and took a chair, and in order to add a touch of ironical gayety to the scene, she went off, she who never touched a needle, to look for a new handkerchief of her husband's, and tried to embroider



in the corner, with very loving fingers, a magnificent Gothic "L." And, instead of that aggravating "*Parsifal*," she could cheerfully have sung, just then, the classic air of "*Everybody's Doing It*."

But this simple pastime soon wearied her. She found she could not watch the passers-by and the movements of the needle at one and the same time. Moreover, her watch said a quarter to two; it was time to begin to be serious. And she stationed herself in a position of attentive observation.

Several times she thought she recognized him, her bold, candid lover; and at ten minutes to two her heart beat fast. Yes, it was certainly he who was drawing nearer, over there. How quickly he passed! And how short a time she had in which to laugh at him! But she was very glad to see him in such a hurry. That hasty eagerness charmed her. What would she have said if he had been a quarter of an hour late? She would almost have had the right to make a scene!

Her brow grew darker. After all, was that he who was hurrying toward the chapel now?



There was a hesitating look in Claudia's eyes. No doubt she had been mistaken. And a quarter of an hour later she thought she recognized Crawford once more in a man who stood motionless, waiting near the entrance.

All her pleasure was spoilt. That lorgnette was not much good, thought Claudia. She ought to have got into a closed carriage and ordered the driver to wait in front of the cathedral. Thus she would have seen her poor lover close at hand, by raising the blind a little. She would have been able to study his physiognomy, to remark his uneasiness, to note the features contort with alarm. It would have been delicious.

She sat down again. A sudden temptation assailed her; to go and confess, now, that very instant, confess in that grave, silent, gloomy chapel, in a confessional close to where *he* stood. What supreme joy to proclaim to her confessor her absolute purity, her wifely virtue, whilst watching with a saintly gaze the lover waiting with feverish impatience.

She resisted the perverse inclination. She might not have time to dress. So, to distract



her thoughts, whilst she waited for the return of her little family, she had recourse to her habitual custom, a very childish custom, but so sweet! She imagined that one of her friends, her best friends, that dear, good Alice, was with her in Quebec. Ah, that was it! An indefinable gleam shone in Claudia's eyes. She had a most resourceful imagination. And in a low voice she saw herself whispering to her little friend all the details of this lovely adventure. There was a smile on her face.

"Just imagine, my dear," she was saying mentally to Alice, and Claudia was so lost in her dream that she gesticulated expressively, and almost murmured the words aloud, "Just imagine, I have a lover."

"Good-looking?" asked Alice.

"Not bad," replied Claudia. (Of course, she must not let it be concluded that Crawford was a handsome fellow, purely out of coquetry.)

"And is he very much in love with you?"

"You shall see for yourself," replied Claudia, with a note of triumph in her voice.



And she rose to take her confidant with her to the chapel. . . .

"Oh, no," said Claudia aloud, finding she had risen in real earnest to go to the Basilica. "These imaginary conversations with Alice would lead me too far."

And to divert her thoughts she sat down at the piano, singing "*Parsifal*."

That night she slept. The next morning she donned another new gown of studied simplicity, and in perfect taste; then she informed her husband that she was going out with Louise.

"Where are you going, so early?"

"To Mass."

Louis looked astonished.

"Really?"

"Would you care to come with us? It is at nine o'clock."

And she drew his attention to the fact that this day, the second of October, was the third anniversary of the death of an aunt.

It was a fresh morning. They had reached the Basilica in ten minutes.

Claudia hesitated for some time before she



finally chose their places. She stopped first at a chair near the entrance; then she thought it her duty to kneel down in an obscure corner of the chapel; then her eyes were attracted by a strange door, which opened on one side of the church, and through which the faithful passed in compact files. She had not known of this entrance, and she appeared to be very much surprised.

But Mass had begun. Claudia foraged with lowered eyes; she reflected that the night before, or the night before that, Crawford had perhaps knelt in the same spot, whilst glancing feverishly at his watch. And this pleasant supposition redoubled her piety.

When the priest had pronounced the Benediction, the faithful departed; but Claudia lingered, with the intention of examining all the curiosities of the old church. She slowly made a tour of the sacred building, gazing at the pillars, the altars, the confessionals. From time to time she touched the chairs as she passed, and she thought with a thrill of pleasure that her naïve adorer must also have touched one among their number.



Then, upon reflection, she convinced herself that the composer, during his long waits, had neither knelt nor sat down, but must have looked at the pictures and deciphered the inscriptions upon the walls; she did the same, in company with Louise, and for a long time stood in ecstasies before some of the *ex-votos*.

“It is a good revenge,” she thought in self-excuse, “and it does one good.”

As they were leaving the building, she turned to her daughter.

“A very pretty chapel, isn’t it?” she asked.

And she was not at all pleased with Louise, when the latter declared that on the contrary she thought it rather ordinary.

They sat down to lunch with good appetites. Danville wondered where they should spend the afternoon. Claudia declared that for a visit to the fortress to be complete one must hear a military band. It so happened that this very day a regimental band from Ottawa was coming to give a concert.

The Danville trio were there at two o’clock. But the concert did not begin until three. They walked about. Claudia did not want to



go too far away, declaring that there would surely be a rush for places. She was excited, and looked very pretty. Her eyes of golden-brown had never gleamed with so bright a light above her delicately-tinted cheeks. Life, abundant and exuberant, seemed to course through her veins; she would have liked to play at skipping with Louise. And suddenly turning to her husband, she said:—

“You haven’t seen the chapel of the Basilica yet, have you? Do come! It is quite interesting.”

The idea had appealed to her all in a flash. To go to Crawford’s rendezvous on her husband’s arm! Would not her revenge be complete! She felt a mad desire to laugh aloud.

“Aren’t you coming? What do you want to stay here for?” she said to Danville, who had not greeted the proposition very enthusiastically.

She drew him along. What a joke it would be! Ah! this clever young man had wounded her! Ah! he had fondly imagined that some



day or other she would be his! The simpleton!

Nevertheless, she trembled. Perhaps the blow would be too severe for Crawford; perhaps it would cover him with too much confusion! And if he were to blush too conspicuously, if he were to appear too obviously disturbed?

"Bah! He would deserve the lesson!" she said to herself.

And aloud:—

"Hurry up, Louis!"

She wanted to be the first to enter the chapel. No doubt Crawford, anxiously waiting, would perceive her immediately, and believing her to be alone, would breathe a sigh of victory. . . .

"Just wait!" she whispered inwardly.  
"Just wait, my good man!"

For two seconds, before the baize door, she listened to the beating of her heart. She was afraid she might faint. She felt as though her eyes were closing . . . what was she going to do when she got there?



But she summoned up her failing courage, and stretched forth a trembling hand to the door.

The noise of the opening door resounded loudly through the chapel. Claudia held it back to let her daughter and her husband pass. Then, quivering from head to foot, she dipped two ice-cold fingers in the holy water, and made the Sign of the Cross.

"Well! suppose you show me the marvels!" whispered Louis.

She said not a word. She remained motionless in front of a chair, murmuring an unconscious prayer. There was a mist before her eyes. She took a few hesitating steps, looking discreetly at an aged lady counting her beads on the left. Then her eyes traveled furtively to a very fat man whose heavy footfalls were audible towards the right of the chapel; then she walked timidly down the aisle, between her daughter and her husband. She turned pale; no longer did she think the *ex-votos* interesting. She walked more quickly, looking into all the corners, asked Danville the time, and left the church five



minutes later, choking with rage. . . . Crawford was not there!

“The wretch!”

She muttered the words between her teeth. She glanced up at the clock. It was only twenty minutes to three!

So Roger — for in her thoughts he was Roger, not Crawford — Roger had not waited for her more than half-an-hour! What insolence! Would not any decent man have stayed till three o'clock, or a quarter-past? And perhaps, for all she knew, he had not come at all!

A dull feeling of rebellion set her sensitive nostrils quivering. Perhaps he would not come the next day, either, to this rendezvous to which she did not want to go herself! It was really beyond endurance.

Then she smiled.

“After all, what more could I wish for? He does not love me! It was nothing serious. I ought to be glad!”

So, she was happy. But the music of the military band seemed perfectly execrable, and as soon as the concert was over she was in a



great hurry to get away. She scarcely uttered a word. Danville and Louise chattered gayly. She led them through a labyrinth of absurd by-streets, where she lingered an interminable time, for the pleasure of looking at the different shops. She made her husband and her daughter walk up and down the same street three times.

"Are we playing at hobby horses?" asked Louis, who was in a good humor.

She looked at him with flashing eyes. Why did he not understand? . . .

Claudia had to be the first to speak, with contracted lips, of Mr. Roger Crawford.

"Ah! by the way," said Danville, as soon as she had mentioned the composer's name, "we have to pass his hotel. Shall we go up just to bid him good-day?"

Claudia, obedient to the dictates of elementary strategy, did not greet the proposal very eagerly. But she meekly followed her husband.

"Perhaps he is ill," she thought, as she crossed the hotel courtyard.

And this reflection consoled her.



Louis led the two ladies up narrow flights of stairs and along gloomy corridors. He stopped outside a door bearing an oval porcelain plaque inscribed with the number "24." That was the room. With a rapid movement Claudia adjusted her veil and patted her hair.

Louis knocked. There was a long silence. Louis knocked again.

"He is not there," he said in an off-hand voice, and very light-heartedly he turned to go downstairs again.

Sure enough, on the landing of the second floor, the hotel porter informed him that Mr. Crawford had gone out.

But they had scarcely walked twenty yards down the street when they saw a fair woman, a little too elaborately got up, walking towards them. A young man accompanied this beautiful creature.

"Good afternoon!" he exclaimed as he bowed to his friends.

"We have just come from your place," said Danville, and he raised his hat to the blonde lady.

Crawford introduced her then.



"Mlle. Rignetti, of the Metropolitan Opera Company. But you will come back I hope, Mrs. Danville? I was just going in."

Claudia, whose sharp eyes had been taking in every detail of the singer's costume, could not bring herself to open her lips.

Then Danville excused himself on account of his wife and daughter, who had merely wished to run in and bid the composer good-day.

Mlle. Rignetti and Crawford walked part of the way back with them.

"Have you been for a walk?" he asked in his cordial, musical voice.

"Oh! no," replied Louis. "We only went to the chapel of the Basilica at two o'clock."

Claudia felt a crimson tide mounting to her forehead.

"The simpleton!" she thought. "Why did he want to say that?"

She turned her back to the singer, and beneath Crawford's gaze her own eyes fell. "What a humiliation!" she thought.

She moved away, quivering with shame. And the young man's commonplace hand-



shake sent a shudder through her arm right up to her shoulder.

She felt as though she wanted to cry. The corners of her mouth quivered with anger. She turned to Danville, saying abruptly: —

“A nice thing, wasn’t it! To bring us face to face with that creature!”

“But, my dear, I was not to know.”

“Oh! come! A composer of sentimental music! Is it likely he would be walking about with anyone else but a singer?”

They went indoors, and in their own apartment the dispute was continued.

“And that,” said Claudia, “is a gentleman who has sat down at our table!”

Danville opened astonished eyes.

“A gentleman who has accidentally met an actress in the street! What a crime!”

“Oh! Met?”

“Well?”

“Oh! really, you are disgusting. You forget that your daughter is listening to you.”

An hour later the discussion began again.

“She was pretty, that actress creature!” said Claudia mockingly.



"Her face was not so bad."

"Perhaps! I, for one, could only have seen it underneath the powder."

"Certain of your friends powder themselves quite as much as that."

"I will thank you not to compare my friends with that gentleman's companion."

"Oh! is it his fiancée?"

Claudia shrugged her shoulders with a pitying air.

"You are not very considerate for Mrs. Crawford," said Danville.

It was Claudia's turn now to look astonished.

"What did you say?"

"Didn't you know, then, that Crawford was married?"

"Married?"

"And the father of a child?"

"Married — a father — he?"

"Why, everyone knows that."

She sat down on a low chair at his feet, and clasping her hands on her husband's knee, quivering with eager curiosity, she said: —

"Tell me — tell me all about it."



“Oh! it is very little that I know; only just what I was told by one of his friends last year at a dance. He has been married four or five years. A charming woman; it seems she is always ill, that is why he does not take her out with him. Or else it is his mother-in-law who is often indisposed. I have forgotten the exact details, you know. Yes, after all, I think it is Mrs. Crawford's mother who is always ill. She lives either at Lenox or Stockbridge, and is always wanting her daughter to stay with her. Mrs. Crawford spends half her time there with her son, a baby three or four years old. Crawford, of course, is naturally compelled to remain in New York on account of his work. That is what I have heard; I think that is the version, though I won't be absolutely sure. After all, it is no concern of ours. He is a charming fellow, and if I don't take the liberty of inquiring after his wife it is because I have not the honor of knowing her.”

Claudia seemed as though she could scarcely breathe. Her pupils dilated as though she would fain have gazed from one



end of the continent to the other in search of this mysterious Mrs. Crawford, whose existence she had not even suspected five minutes before.

“What a queer story,” she said, and then, rising abruptly to her feet, she asked, “Why have you never mentioned this before?”

“When have I ever had any occasion to do so? We were not interested in this gentleman before last Sunday. Besides, what does it matter if he be married or single? It does not rob him of his talent!”

And as if to put an end to the discussion, Danville began looking for Crawford’s melody among the various papers.

During dinner Claudia said, with a cynical smile, “She ought to be pretty, this Mrs. Crawford — if any such person exists!”

“Why not?” returned Danville.

“Do you think any self-respecting woman would have had anything to do with such a puppet as that?”

“But the puppet has plenty of life in it, my dear.”

“Really! Oh! I haven’t examined him



very closely! But I think, if I remember rightly, his eyes . . .”

“Magnificent black eyes, my dear!”

“Gray,” she corrected.

“Possibly. I am not a man of detail. I only know the general effect is pleasing.”

“His neck is horrible!”

“I don’t think so.”

“It is like a prize-fighter’s. You can see four or five of them for twenty-five cents at Atlantic City.”

“That is no argument against Crawford; quite the contrary!”

“And that absurd lock of hair on his forehead!”

“Oh! Is there a lock?”

“Yes, carefully curled! The conceited fop!”

And then, speaking through her nose, she imitated the composer’s voice so successfully that Louise went off into shrieks of laughter.

“Be quiet, Baby!” said Danville to his wife. “He might be at the door for all we know.”

Claudia rose.



"He? He shall never set foot in here again!" she cried emphatically.

And, as her husband looked amazed, she sang the air from "*Parsifal*," to distract his attention, in an irresistible falsetto, which sounded like a caricature, as it were, of the musician's voice.

And Anna, the maid, burst out laughing too, in the next room.

They went to bed very late that night, and Claudia did not fall asleep until three o'clock in the morning. Troubled dreams made her start up in bed, and now and again she whispered in her sleep, murmuring in frantic tones: —

"No, no, no!"

At dawn, still dreaming, she called her husband's name. Danville awoke at the sound.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

She looked about her with astonished eyes. Then she smiled, kissed Louis, and her eyelids closed once more.

And a moment later, beneath the warm, caressing contact of the sheets, she quivered from head to foot.



"No, no!" she said, still dreaming.

She seemed to be resisting something, or someone, with all her strength, and struggled with all her might.

But suddenly the stiffened body relaxed with a long sigh of bliss. She stretched out her arms, resisting no longer, in an ecstasy of relief that the struggling was over and her dream ended.

"Have you been frightened in the night, my own little Claudia?"

She opened her eyes at these words of sympathy from her husband, and drew back with a little gasp of astonishment.

"You, Louis!"

"Yes, darling!"

"Oh! I am so thankful. I have had an awful nightmare, and thought someone was trying to murder me."

She was trembling all over, and as if not yet recovered from her fright, she hid her terrified face beneath the bed-clothes.



## CHAPTER V

### THE IMPRESSIONABLE CRAWFORD

A poet without love were a physical and metaphysical impossibility.

THOMAS CARLYLE.

THAT morning, as she offered her lips for her husband's matutinal kiss, Claudia murmured with an imperceptible note of sadness in her voice: —

“Louis, if you were a nice husband, you would do something for me.”

“Oh! if you look at me like that, I can't refuse. Well, what is it?”

“I should like to go back to New York.”

He looked amazed.

“When?”

“As soon as possible.”

“But why?”

“I am not well. This place tires me. I shall get ill if I don't leave here at once.”



They were to have stayed another week. But Louis did not press the point.

Anna set to work at once to pack their trunks.

Claudia was very happy.

"I am saved!" she thought. "I shall not see him again. New York will divert my thoughts."

She was very sweet to Louis. Never had her maternal tenderness found sweeter words or lavished more minute attentions, even upon Louise.

"If anyone rings you are not to open the door," she told the servant.

It was a day of feverish hurry and bustle. They scarcely had time to eat. Claudia was quite breathless, and hardly sat still a minute. She insisted upon helping Anna. She packed and folded to such good purpose that in a few hours all was ready.

"Shall we go and say good-by to Crawford?" suggested Danville, as all was ready for their departure.

"I haven't time. You can write to him."

"But . . ."



"You can tell him we have been called back to New York on urgent business."

It was raining. Anna went down to order a cab for a quarter to eleven. The ferry left at eleven-fifteen. They would travel all night, and would arrive at Montreal the following morning.

Louis wrote a friendly note to Crawford. Claudia's eyes shone with melancholy pleasure. Her hands trembled with impatience. She was afraid of losing the train. The station was so far from the town! She spoke of Beauport, and expressed some regret at not having brought away some souvenir of that charming spot. There was a jingle of bells, the *calèche* drew up before the hotel, and before going down, Claudia kissed her husband and her daughter with tear-filled eyes.

As they drove away, Mrs. Danville, looking very pale, put her head out of the window. She remained thus for a long time, in order to catch a glimpse of a certain little window on the third floor of a neighboring hotel.

"Is there a light in his room?" asked Danville.



She shuddered.

"No, it is all in darkness," replied Claudia slowly.

The train left a few minutes late. But when the engine at last laboriously puffed out of the station Claudia uttered a sigh of relief. She would escape him, escape that disturbing personality, that man whom her eyes thought handsome and fascinating, in spite of her will.

She would escape him, that stranger, who, in taking possession of her lips, seemed to have vanquished her entirely, as if she had been inoculated by the moisture of that magic kiss with the venom of love.

They found a compartment while the porter made up their berths and as Danville carefully spread the rugs over her knees, he said:—

"I told him, you know, in my letter, that you were at home to visitors every Tuesday."

"Told whom?"

"Crawford."

The shrill scream of the engine echoed joyously in the still night air.

. . . . .



Roger Crawford was a native of New York. His father had been an attorney there, where he was able to live in excellent style, thanks to his position as counsel to several large corporations.

The composer was, indeed, married. He was not proud of the fact; but he did not conceal it. His wife's name was Marguerite. She had borne him one son, named Duncan. The child was dark, like its father. Crawford adored him. The marriage had taken place five years ago, and therefore Duncan was four years old.

Roger Crawford's wife was the only daughter of an old lady of Stockbridge, a Mrs. Raymond, who stood in terror of the noise and bustle of city life. She lived alone at her old home where she had passed her whole life.

Mrs. Raymond adored her daughter, but felt only a moderate liking for her son-in-law. She had good reasons for this. To begin with, Crawford lived in New York, and she had a particular distrust of this city. Moreover, Crawford was poor, whilst Marguerite had a certain "dot." And finally, Crawford



emphatically refused to leave his wife in Stockbridge, and Marguerite had perforce to forsake her mother's side.

This was a great grief to Mrs. Raymond, who declared she was ill. And her malady, which was, indeed, in all probability, quite as often real as imaginary, necessitated, on Marguerite's part, numerous journeys to Stockbridge.

During the first year of her marriage Marguerite Crawford lived in New York, but as soon as little Duncan appeared upon the scene she had to spend a third of her time with her mother. The old widow, especially in winter, experienced intense alarms. If she had the most trifling cold she would telegraph to her daughter; she was always imagining herself to be at death's door; and she would cheerfully have retarded her recovery sometimes in order to keep her bonny little grandson with her a little longer.

Crawford accompanied his wife to Stockbridge, and remained there fairly contentedly for twenty-four hours. After that it generally happened that a letter from a music publisher,



or a theatrical manager, or a literary collaborator, demanded his immediate return to New York.

This particular September, Mrs. Raymond, having wired to announce the return of old rheumatic pains, he had gone with his wife and son; and then, the temperature being warm, and Stockbridge somewhat dull, he had obtained permission to run up to Quebec for a few days.

Thus, on the morning of October 6th when he received Danville's letter, announcing his abrupt departure, Crawford felt a keen pang of disappointment. He had intended to remain another week. He had notified the fact to all his friends, and especially to his wife. Why had Mrs. Danville gone away? He speedily realized that the chief charm of Quebec lay in Claudia's eyes. He did not hesitate, therefore; he packed up his trunks and returned to New York on October 7th.

He was in love.

Love does not listen to argument. It is proper and dignified to say that real love only comes once in a lifetime, and that only a Mor-



mon could pretend to several objects of affection at one time. Crawford proclaimed this pretty philosophy, these charming moral principles, about as loudly as the rest, and he shuddered very sincerely, when he read in the newspapers of married men running away with their friends' wives.

But, also like the rest, it was rather difficult for him to see a pretty woman without falling in love with her; and he knew too well how sweet, how estimable, in the vanity of earthly things, is the souvenir of a fine collection of young creatures who have whispered: "I love you!" as they deliver their entire hearts into your keeping, to be too harshly severe in his judgment of those pleasant sensations which germinated in the warmth of his own mind. And his unbiased, healthy opinion, for his mind was untrammelled by the narrow restrictions of social and religious systems, was that when the spark of passion is ignited the only guilty party — if there be any guilt — is that enigmatical Goddess of Chance who throws pleasing women across the pathway of susceptible men.



Moreover, Crawford respected the exterior forms of the conventions. If some of his ideals of beauty were occasionally realized in the flesh, and the occurrence could not have been so very rare, Crawford always cast a veil of protecting mystery over his gallant adventures, which in love constitutes, perhaps, the supreme morality. He was ever prudent, ever cautious, even in his most passionate moments.

Mrs. Danville had appealed to him. He had only the most common-place and ordinary recollections of those distant dances, where he had often met her. Claudia had merely given him the impression of a beautiful statue, a charming example of beauty.

But on that autumn afternoon, when he had seen her cheeks aglow with excitement on the Hill of Montmorency, he had thought her superb, wonderful, and those deep gray eyes seemed to him to contain inexhaustible treasures of love.

He admired her madly. And Claudia had certainly seemed to reciprocate the feeling, for one long minute, at all events, when she gave



him her lips on the hill-top bathed in the rosy light of the setting sun.

In that brief episode, lasting but a few moments, their hearts had exchanged unspoken promises.

And from that evening Crawford adored Claudia with all the sincerity of his physical being, which is perhaps the only sort of sincerity that is not deceptive.

He adored her completely; that is to say, that from that hour he was entirely submissive and entirely devoted to her. And if he had been asked to what woman he desired to consecrate his whole existence, exclusively, and without restriction, he would have replied: "To Claudia!" in the same perfect good faith as he would perhaps have thought the night before, "to Marie," and as he would think, no doubt, on the morrow, "to Marion!"

Besides, what does it matter if love's vows be not rigidly observed, when it is so sweet a thing even to utter them?

Science has recently discovered that the various cells of which a man is composed are entirely replaced every few months; thus is



the frailty of human affection accounted for. It is not we ourselves who are forgetful of a woman; it is the later man which has just been built up, cell by cell, that which we naïvely term our *ego*, for whom this woman possesses no attraction.

Crawford had felt exactly the same towards Marguerite Raymond as he now felt towards Claudia Danville. He had loved his wife with all the strength of his twenty-three years. He still loved her tenderly, and Duncan, his bonny boy, was the joy of his existence. And not for worlds would he have brought sorrow to either of them. Was that to say that his heart must remain sealed to any other affection? His artistic temperament seemed to rebel against any such suggestion, to negative any tendency which might restrict his perfect freedom of thought and action. Does not a father who has four children love them all completely, with all the fervor, with every fiber of his paternal being? And yet would not one be surprised to hear that a man could love four women simultaneously, with all his heart?



Crawford returned to New York with the fixed idea of paying court to Claudia. He did not want her to pass out of his sight. His dignity would not admit of such a thing. One never knows how much, in this complex sentiment which urges a man to court a woman, should be attributed to pride, and how much to love.

Claudia had not kept the various appointments he had made, and the fact had hurt, though not discouraged him. The first day he had waited for her an hour; the second, three-quarters; the third, only half-an-hour. This was the reason, therefore, Claudia had not seen him when she had gone to the chapel of the Basilica with Louis and Louise.

But when, in the company of a singer for whom he did not care two straws, picked up in a Quebec café, he had seen Mrs. Danville blush, when he had heard the husband make the interesting remark referring to the visit to the chapel, at the time fixed for the rendezvous, Crawford's nostrils had quivered imperceptibly, like a good hound recovering an old scent. Mrs. Danville was still his. The seed



of love he had planted on that memorable Sunday evening still lived and flourished, and would doubtless accomplish its natural evolution, bursting into bloom before it withered away and died.

Crawford lived in New York, on Forty-fourth Street. He occupied an apartment in a hotel just west of Fifth Avenue.

He arrived home at eight o'clock in the morning, on October 9th, after a night of insomnia and blissful anticipation. His wife and son would be staying at Stockbridge for another three days.

As soon as he had shaken off the dust of the journey he dressed and went out.

He knew Claudia's address in the West Seventies. Danville had reminded him of the fact in his farewell letter. He hailed a cab, and drove north.

He stopped the driver at No. —, in West Seventy-eighth Street. There was a hotel almost opposite, and he entered the café, and while apparently sipping a suspicious-looking beverage, attentively examined the establishment where Mrs. Danville resided.



It was a tall five-storied building, in every way an exact counterpart of the other houses in this immediate vicinity. The apartments looked very spacious and comfortable, each one being fitted with seven windows, looking out upon the street. One floor — the third — was to let; two others — the first and the fifth — had their shutters closed, a sign that the occupants were still away on their holidays. Therefore Mrs. Danville must occupy either the second or the fourth.

Crawford went out to pay the driver his fare, and then returned to the café, and ordered another drink. He stayed three hours in this café, with neck outstretched, and impatient eyes. None of the passers-by could see him there. An embroidered muslin curtain hid him from all curious glances from outside. Motionless, holding in his hands a newspaper of which he had not even read the title, he continued to examine the mysterious windows of the two floors opposite.

He came again in the afternoon, and again the next day; but not a glimpse of Mrs. Danville did he obtain.



Occasionally a woman entered or left the house. Was it she? The greater part of the time he could not even tell whether the person was dark or fair, young or old. And he became quite exhausted with hope deferred.

Would she never show herself at one of those implacable windows? If she really thought about him at all — and it was impossible that Claudia's thoughts should not return occasionally to Quebec and Montmorency — could she not divine that he was there, quite close to her, distracted at not seeing her?

Thus Crawford's longing hourly increased. He knew from experience that the first days of a society intrigue are the most dangerous. The fever of waiting, the furious desire for the climax, make even the most discreet commit indiscretions. Even he had to pull himself together sharply to prevent himself rushing into that house of mystery, and shouting aloud to Mrs. Danville:

“It is I! I love you! I have been waiting for you for three whole days!”

But a small modicum of reason still re-



mained to him, and he therefore told himself:

“No, everyone thinks I am at Quebec. I must still wait here for some time, and then I shall only be permitted to see her on a Tuesday, her ‘At Home’ day, and when I do see her I shall only be able to hold her fingers for half-a-second in my gloved hand. Then I shall have to sit down, and listen with a sympathetic expression to the conversation of people I know nothing about, who, like myself, will be sitting around her making amiable grimaces and talking nonsense!”

Glancing at a calendar he found he could not decently present himself at the Danville establishment before Tuesday, October 15th.

Nevertheless, he seized this very first opportunity, and went. It was raining. New York seemed wrapped in gloom. Crawford was quite joyful.

“Perhaps she will be alone!” he thought hopefully.

At four o’clock he found himself at last before the front door of the house.

He had once more assumed his impenetrable



mask. His mouth was quite firm, and in a well-modulated voice he asked the hall-boy:—

“Mrs. Danville, please?”

“The second floor.”

As he rode up in the elevator he felt as though his limbs were giving way beneath him. He was afraid he might look too pale. But a mirror reassured him. And to his black hair, slightly disarranged by his hat, he gave the handsome, cavalier-like twist, which his friends openly jeered at, but which others perhaps inwardly admired.

Nevertheless, it was not without violent emotion that he pressed his fingers to the button of the electric bell.

“Oh, I have never loved like this!” he told himself, forgetting that he had made the same mental observation elsewhere, outside doors of oak, and mahogany, and walnut, and perhaps even deal.

A servant in a black coat relieved him of his umbrella, helped him to remove his overcoat, and, passing through the vestibule, raised a heavy portière.



Then Crawford saw her, the woman who, a fortnight ago, had given him her lips.

The room was rather dark, but she sat near one of the windows, and he could discern her dark silhouette standing out from the shadows. She rose to greet him; perhaps she turned pale, but it was impossible to tell. And her little bare hand did not tremble in the light gray kid glove of her visitor.

"Oh! it's you, Mr. Crawford!"

She said the words very conventionally, with just the right shade of welcome in her voice. And the two lady visitors, to whom she introduced the composer, bowed with that imperceptible nod which is the correct salutation to a stranger.

And they talked of art, of hypnotism, of popular tenors, of toy dogs.

Beneath his polite society smile Crawford was profoundly unhappy. Though he did not like to permit himself to cherish illusions, he had not anticipated such a disappointing interview.

And when the attention of the lady guests was withdrawn from himself he was able



to examine Mrs. Danville attentively. He found no responsive gleam in her gray eyes.

The two ladies left together, and Roger Crawford felt a heavy weight at his heart. So they would be alone in a tête-à-tête, and in a few moments would probably be decided the issue of that delicate intrigue which might either grow into an ardent passion, or which might now terminate in dull friendship, if not mutual disdain.

"How dull it is!" said Claudia, coming back to Crawford after taking leave of her friends. "Won't you sit down for a while?" And, without looking at him, she continued. "My daughter is at her drawing lesson, and as for my husband, business keeps him away from home for a great part of the day."

As she spoke she made as if to sit down on a low chair near Crawford's own; then, with a light jingle of slender gold bangles, she passed on to a big arm-chair a little further away.

Crawford, in his low, musical voice, spoke of Louise and Danville; and, having been duly informed of the state of their health, he took



up his hat with that uncompleted gesture which signifies all the world over: "You know I am going now."

But Claudia had risen from her chair.

"May I offer you a little sherry?"

She moved towards a small table, where shone the silver stopper of a decanter, and, pouring out a glass of wine, handed it to Crawford. He noticed the exquisite poise of her hand, over which the blue decanter cast a soft aureole of azure. And he might even have carried it to his lips, in spite of the gloominess of the weather and the surroundings, if Mrs. Danville had not handed him, in most prosaic fashion, with the other hand, a dish of pastries.

He drank, he ate; and his eyes betrayed nothing of the awful disappointment in his heart. And Claudia talked volubly and wittily of everything under the sun.

And it was this circumstance in particular which discouraged Crawford. He knew that keen wit and passion seldom go together. Love, from the intellectual point of view, brings women to the same level. It lends wit



to the simple-minded ones, and takes it away from those who possess it. Mrs. Danville should have been artless and simple.

He rose, and Claudia's voice seemed pitched in a slightly lower key, as she asked: —

“Do you care for pictures?”

And she invited him to pass into the next room, where shone the great gilt frames.

She showed him many costly canvases, a Gustave Courbet, a Gustave Moreau, and other Gustaves who happened to be *à la mode*. As he stood before each picture Crawford found without the slightest difficulty just the right thing to say, just the sort of commonplace, admiring compliment so dear to the heart of an intelligent collector.

They examined in this fashion a dozen pictures, four or five bronzes, and two or three statuettes. And all the time both spoke in lowered, somewhat mournful voices, which seemed to die away in their throats.

They never drew near each other, their eyes did not once meet; they were afraid to be sincere. And when Crawford bowed a final farewell, the tone of Claudia's voice seemed to



change once more. But she smiled as she turned to him saying: —

“Till next Tuesday, then?”

And as she went with him to the door, she pointed out to him a little ivory Virgin, and an ormolu Buddha.

But the delays were only slight, and he was going . . . going . . . and they discovered then that they wanted to talk of literature. But they had reached the vestibule. It was still raining. Crawford bowed.

“Then, on Tuesday?” repeated Claudia.

And the door of the vestibule closed with a little hollow sound.

But as he was slowly getting into his overcoat — the process seemed to take an unconscionable time — he saw the dining-room door suddenly open again.

“It just struck me, Mr. Crawford; have you a cab at the door? Shall I have one called?”

He smiled his thanks, and bowed again as he took up his umbrella.

“Thank you, Mrs. Danville.”

And he hurried downstairs with a longing



to dash his head against the wall. But he had only got a little way down when he trembled as the sound of a piano reached his ears. Someone upstairs had just begun to play, and the first notes overwhelmed the heart of the musician. Was it not the prelude to his own melody?

He stopped and half-turned, mechanically, as if to retrace his steps.

Had he heard aright? Or was it only fancy, only a consoling error of his imagination?

He waited a moment. The music did not begin again. And Crawford slowly began to descend once more the wide, silent staircase.

As soon as he reached the street, he raised his eyes furtively to the second story; and he quite thought he saw a corner of the window curtain raised and then dropped again. But it was perhaps some idle servant looking out at the falling rain.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE DAWN OF LOVE

A mighty pain to love it is,  
And 'tis a pain that pain to miss;  
But of all pains, the greatest pain  
It is to love, but love in vain.

ABRAHAM COWLEY.

ON the following Saturday Crawford went again to the hotel café in West Seventy-eighth Street, near the Danvilles' apartment, and made a pretense of reading a newspaper. Something still called him to Claudia's side; one last ray of hope still remained to him. Those few bars upon the piano reëchoing on the landing, had left a long, harmonious vibration in his memory. The more he thought of it, the more he became convinced that the music came from the second story, and that those four or five confused notes heard whilst his head was in a whirl, belonged to his "*Song of the Roses.*"



"She will have repented by now," he thought, feeling that he might consider this musical exercise in the same light as those postscripts to lovers' letters, which proclaim in one line: "I love you still!" when they have declared in two pages: "All is over between us!"

So, on the Saturday, at about three o'clock, Crawford suddenly trembled as he gazed at the house opposite. Claudia and Louise had just come out and were walking in the direction of the Park.

Crawford rose, paid his bill, left the café, followed the wife and daughter at a convenient distance, and saw them get into a taxicab.

Mrs. Danville turned her back after having given an address to the driver.

Had she seen Crawford? Evidently yes, for she looked back again in the direction of her home, just as the cab was turning down Central Park West.

And suddenly, Claudia turned to Louise, and said: —

"I have forgotten to bring a handkerchief! Chauffeur! —"



"I'll lend you mine, Mamma! It isn't worth while going back to the house!"

Claudia inwardly scolded herself for her clumsiness. Then, with a happier inspiration, she went on:—

"And I see, too, that I haven't brought enough money with me. . . . Take my keys, and go back home. Bring me a handkerchief and fifteen or twenty dollars. Go in the taxi, I'll wait for you here; or no, a block up the street, by the church-steps. Go now."

The young girl did not care to make any more objections. She obeyed and Claudia sprang lightly to the ground.

"Go now, my dear!"

Thus Claudia was able to retrace her steps, walk past Crawford, who had already turned the corner, without looking at him, and exclaim in tones of astonishment, with quite a natural blush, when the composer bowed to her, "You! I am waiting for my daughter; just imagine! I forgot . . ."

She entered into a too elaborate explanation for Crawford to be taken in by her pleasing little stratagem. And he felt very happy as he



walked away with her, beneath the fading trees, whose last leaves were fluttering to the ground in the heavy wind.

They both trembled slightly and spoke without hearing each other. He was thinking how very beautiful she was, with her pale, wide brow, her mobile mouth, her chin, like that of a laughing child, and her tall, rounded figure, whose exquisite proportions were a delight to the eye. And he realized that that center of attraction which at first, in this woman, he had placed so highly, showed a continual tendency to become lowered.

She, not daring to look at her companion, was probably thinking that Crawford's voice contained a still more caressing note than on that night of folly when they had walked side by side on a hill in the Canadian country. And she glanced in the direction of Seventy-eighth Street, with the unacknowledged fear of seeing Louise returning too soon.

"Already!" Refrain from uttering this exclamation she could not, as she recognized in the distance the light hat her daughter wore.

And then, raising her eyes to Crawford's, she



suddenly shivered. But the next instant she had recovered her self-possession, and was smiling up at him.

“You won’t forget my Tuesdays, will you?”

She walked rapidly away towards the taxicab, with a timid pressure of the hand, which seemed at the same time gently to repulse him, and to signify:—

“Stay there! My daughter might see you.”

And Crawford’s eyes seemed to melt with tenderness as he watched that vanishing figure. And a delicious shudder swept through his limbs as though he had felt himself suddenly transported to the sweet threshold of reciprocated love.

The next day, Sunday, he resolutely presented himself at the house in West Seventy-eighth Street. He had not closed his eyes all night.

“Is Mr. Danville at home?” he asked of the valet.

“Yes, sir.” And Crawford was ushered into the drawing-room. He would certainly have preferred a different answer; but he had foreseen everything.



“How are you, my dear friend?”

Danville entered the room with a most cordial air and welcomed Crawford with a hearty hand-shake.

“I am very glad to see you; my wife told me of your recent visit; I was sorry not to have been at home. So you have returned from Quebec? Charming town! And the music?” Then, abruptly, without waiting for his visitor to reply, he said to the servant:—

“James, tell Mrs. Danville that Mr. Crawford is here. Oh! she will be charmed. We often speak of you.”

And, sitting down at last, after having exhausted a considerable amount of energy in effusions of all sorts, he said:—

“You did quite right to come to-day! We very seldom go out on a Sunday.”

When Mrs. Danville had appeared, Crawford was able to explain the nature of his visit. He had been sent by his wife, who was leaving again for Stockbridge in a couple of days, but who would be very glad, in the interim, to



make the acquaintance of her husband's new friends.

"Could you accord us the great pleasure," he concluded, "of coming to dine with us, quite informally?"

"When?" asked Danville.

"To-day."

He looked at Claudia.

The latter uttered a timid acquiescence.

"Good! then it is arranged!" said Danville.

"We shall be at your place at seven o'clock. Forty-fourth Street, is it not?"

"Number —. You will bring Miss Louise, of course?"

"Certainly."

And Crawford, seeing Danville's hand traveling to his watch-pocket, asked: —

"Perhaps you have to go out?"

"Yes, I am going to fetch my daughter; she has been staying with a friend over on the Drive since yesterday. If you will just wait one moment we'll go down together."

Crawford sat down, and placing his hand in



his coat pocket, appeared very much absorbed for a moment or two, whilst Claudia gave a few instructions to her husband in a very low voice.

He rose when Danville was ready, and with a charming bow and radiant smile said to Claudia, as he walked to the door: —

“Until this evening, then?”

And he passed into the vestibule.

Five minutes later the two men separated on Broadway. Crawford entered a hotel to telephone to his wife, announcing the Danvilles' acceptance of her invitation. Then he walked boldly back to the apartment house where the Danvilles lived, entered, and rode up to the second floor.

“Mrs. Danville has not by any chance come across a pocket-book?” he asked the valet.

“I don't know, sir,” replied the man, “but I'll inquire.”

Mrs. Danville appeared at once. She trembled, and could not find a word to say. Crawford explained in a halting voice, which issued somewhat painfully from his dry lips, that he had been careless enough to drop his



pocket-book, and had discovered his loss immediately after leaving Mr. Danville: that he was more than sorry to trouble her, etc., etc.

"Here it is, sir," the servant announced triumphantly, as he picked up the article which he had discovered under a small table, near a very low footstool.

"Oh! thanks! I am fortunate!" murmured the composer. "It must have fallen out of my pocket when I sat down. Yes, I am fortunate. . . There were . . ."

He plunged into a series of explanations sufficiently detailed to permit the servant to retire, and then found himself alone with Claudia.

It was a fine day, and the street was full of Sabbath silence. Only the light ticking of a small clock, the hands of which pointed to half-past three, was audible, on the corner of a table.

"You are going now?" asked the young wife.

He did not go. He was examining a water-color sketch with dazed eyes, which saw nothing. And he thought how ridiculous he must



appear awkwardly holding his silk hat as if he did not know what to do with it. His lips quivered. Was it for this he had returned, that he had renewed that old trick of the lost pocket-book? For an instant he asked himself if he should not snatch this pretty woman up suddenly in his arms, and press his lips to the coils of her dark hair, without a word. The blood rushed to his forehead, and the veins above his temples throbbed madly.

“Until this evening, then?” he murmured, in a very low voice.

But he could not tear himself away. And seeing her sit down at the piano, he crossed over to her side.

Claudia was silent; her hands trembled; she was pale, and, indeed, looked almost ill. She looked through some music, and suddenly, with a sympathetic smile, showed Crawford his own melody.

And Crawford, in his turn, answered with a smile of joy, as he murmured gently:—

“Then, it was you who was playing the piano, last Tuesday, after my visit?”

The young wife’s lips made no reply. But



her eyes looked at him for an instant; then her eyelids fell, but not before revealing a suspicious glitter which looked remarkably like tears.

“ Oh! God! ” said Crawford, “ it must be a dream! ”

He pressed his ardent lips to those closed eyes.

“ Claudia! ”

She rose.

“ Go away! Go away! ”

But he had only to touch her fingers, and she fell back again into a chair, hiding her face in her hands.

He sat down close to her, and spoke to her in a very gentle whisper, and his words were so eloquent that his heart seemed to tremble on his lips. He drew nearer, quivering with tenderest love. He drew nearer still: he took one of her hands in his, and a wave of intoxication swept through him at this contact.

“ Claudia! Claudia! ” he murmured, his voice husky with excitement. And putting an arm round her neck, he drew her to him. And their lips met in a sigh of love.



But Claudia started back.

"No!" she said, "never do that again. Listen: it is awful to have to make such a confession, but I must. I love you dearly. Oh! yes, with all my heart and soul. I love you to the point of madness. I do not know how it has happened. Perhaps I have loved you long since, without knowing it. All that I know is that since that night at Montmorency there has not been a single hour when I have not thought of you. I am the most unfortunate of women! Oh! if you only knew how I love you! Oh! I am going to cry . . . you must let me . . . it does me good. Don't take any notice, I am very emotional; the least thing makes me cry."

He did not attempt to embrace her again, to fold her close to his breast. There are divine moments at the dawn of love, when a mere contact of the fingers is the greatest happiness. He simply gazed at her, charmed, enraptured. It was Paradise merely to hold her hand. He felt as though he had never loved more than at this moment.

"But," Claudia was saying, "though I love



you, I love my husband also; he, too, loves me, and I shall never betray him."

He understood. He looked at her with his sad, ardent eyes. And this avowal of Claudia's seemed to re-open the volcanoes of love within him. No! He had been mistaken! He loved her alone! And he had never realized it so completely as in that moment.

"Claudia!" he called softly.

And his arms were outstretched towards that bosom, trembling beneath the corsage of her gown.

She pushed him away.

"Never!" she repeated. "Never! I would rather die than let your lips touch mine again!"

She was sincere. In vain did he beseech and implore, in vain did he gaze at her with adoring eyes of love.

"And my husband?" she said. "And my daughter?"

"They will never know!"

"But I shall know!"

"Claudia, do you really love me?"



She sighed; she took both his hands in hers, and she opened her eyes wide as she gazed into Crawford's own, as if she would fain have laid bare her inmost heart.

"Well then, if you do?" he whispered in her ear.

She read his love in his shining eyes. She bent her head, she blushed, she pressed her lover's hand with a despairing gesture; and with lowered eyelids, her voice quivering with shame, she murmured: —

"But we are both married!"

He smiled; and with a furtive shrug of the shoulders, seemed to say: —

"Child!"

With her eyes still closed, in a still lower voice, she continued: —

"But it can't be! it can't! What would people say?"

She descried the same smile on Crawford's countenance. And this time, perhaps, it was her innate sense of virtue which made her blush. She raised her head, opened her eyes, and throwing her half-bare arms round his neck, she cried: —



“Oh! if I had only known you in time! If I only had!”

He felt a thrill of victory at this sign of love; he realized that it would be useless for her to argue; some day, and that day not far distant, she would be his.

Claudia read his thoughts, and her pride was wounded.

“Go away!” she said.

He tried to kiss her, but she refused, fearing lest a servant might enter abruptly, or be listening at the door. And having manifested too much tenderness, pretended to have grown suddenly as hard as stone.

And in spite of Crawford's silent imploring with those beseeching eyes, she remained adamant, repeating: —

“Never! Besides, even if I wanted to elope, I could not! I am never free!”

“Do you mean that?” he asked.

And the sorrow in his face touched the young wife.

“Yes, I mean it!” she replied, in all sincerity.

And then, growing once more sad and



thoughtful, she took Crawford's head in her hands, and stroked it tenderly.

In love virtuous women more easily overstep the bounds of prudence.

"Go! Go now!"

She opened the door herself. And Roger walked stealthily away, still feeling in imagination the touch of those trembling hands.

This time Claudia did not raise the curtain to see him pass. She dropped into an arm-chair, clasped her hands, closed her eyes, and gave herself up to her thoughts.

She was very happy. She felt surrounded by an atmosphere of strange, indefinable joy, and from time to time she pressed her clasped hands together more tightly, as if she had still been holding the hand of Roger Crawford in her own. Oh! a little of him was still there in the room with her! a little of her grave, handsome lover! The tones of his voice, the imperceptible odor that had emanated from that dark head, odor which clings so obstinately to the nostrils of the lover, seemed to fill the room; and Claudia's lips parted in loving longing, as though she would have fain drunk



in the magic moisture of that kiss by the Falls of Montmorency.

The minutes fled, but Love takes no account of time. There are years which are so sweet after years of emptiness! Even a centenarian scarcely lives more than a few hours; the art is in merely filling up the time. The moments Claudia lived through after Crawford's departure filled her heart as if they had been so many months. More than once, with lowered eyelids and quickened breath, she murmured his name: "Roger!" And with each utterance her thoughts sang the praises of the beloved one.

He was handsome, strong, kind. She saw him once again upon the Canadian hillside. How proudly that strong right hand of his had helped her! And therein lay, perhaps, the secret of this conquest: — Crawford had revealed his strength. And it is the same power, perhaps, which will always enchant women, be they intelligent or simple-minded, civilized beings or savages; the power of muscle. She rose suddenly, and taking up the melody, which still lay on the piano, she



kissed with a long sigh of adoration, the sacred spot where he had placed his signature. What torments had she suffered since the hour when he had written that dedication! What attempts at resistance, what efforts of virtue! And it had all been delightfully in vain! It had all changed to love! . . . She was very happy.

Oh! the sadness of that abrupt departure from Quebec! She had speedily realized the futility of that flight. On the train she had already begun to repent. Suppose she never saw Crawford again? She had experienced some terrible alarms during the first week, when her days were spent in remembering and regretting. Happily, the nights were sweet; Crawford returned to Claudia in her dreams, and his presence, alas! was more and more desired. What a storm of emotion had been aroused in her breast, when, on that never-to-be-forgotten Tuesday, Crawford in the flesh had paid her his first visit? He was there, correct, respectful, inwardly fuming. How little did the lover of that day resemble the lover of the preceding nights. The result of



that interview, to which Claudia had looked forward with such eager expectation, so many sweet hopes, was heart-breakingly commonplace.

Why had he come on her reception day, and a rainy day too?

She thought of him from morning till night. She had learnt the "*Song of the Roses*" during the railway journey, whilst Louis and Louise were asleep. She knew it by heart before they arrived at Montreal, and certainly, before they reached the Grand Central Station, she could have reproduced an exact facsimile of every letter in the dedication.

She smiled as she remembered how she had thought of Crawford during the whole of that long journey, and regretted that it could not last forever. Then, realizing as time went on that she became more and more a prey to this inexplicable passion, she had resolved to reconcile herself to the thought. Yes, she would love Crawford in Platonic fashion; as her mind could fix itself upon no other subject, she would permit herself to think of him; it would be a beautiful sentiment, highly



mystical, and exceedingly pure; thus it would only be a very venial fault.

And she really did intend, faithfully, and in all sincerity, to plan a sort of programme, setting forth the limits of that idyllic attachment. She would see Crawford often, she would permit him long handclasps, she would allow him to hold tender, sympathetic conversations with her, and sometimes, behind a door or in a dark window, he might kiss her brow, or very occasionally her cheek; perhaps on Sunday he should be permitted to touch her neck with his lips! But that would be all, practically all.

But, on that day, when Crawford had returned to the house, with the excuse of the lost pocket-book, Claudia had been slightly confused. She had already taken his head in her hands to press it against her heart; the programme had certainly not been too rigidly observed!

Thus, in order to punish herself, she rose, and with an instinctive shrug of the shoulders, walked up and down the room as if she would shake off the subtle spell of Crawford's



memory. She walked about singing, opening doors and drawers, taking up newspapers, and turning over the leaves of one or two books. Her nerves seemed on the alert. Strange thoughts whirled through her brain. She looked at the clock; half-past five! She would see her lover once more before that needle had described two of those tiny circles! She went to her room to dress. She perfumed and powdered as in a dream, as though it were to a lover's rendezvous she was going instead of to dine with friends. Danville returned at six o'clock; Louise had a bouquet for her mother. The latter kissed Louise and her husband with tender, caressing lips; and she noticed in the long pier glass, as she was powdering her neck, that she had not changed color.

They were ready too soon. They left the house at half-past six, and at a quarter to seven the cab dropped them in Forty-fourth Street.

Claudia wanted to take a turn round the block. Dusk had fallen; it was quite mild, and Claudia leaned heavily against her husband as she walked up and down outside her



lover's door. She studied the neighborhood, and was happy in the thought that Crawford's eyes had roamed over the same objects.

They were lighting the gas. Every minute a yellow star was added to the long row of yellow stars already lit.

And Claudia's heart beat more rapidly when they rode up in the elevator to the sixth floor. She quivered with impatience; she was going to see her at last, this Mrs. Crawford, of whom she had been so jealous.

Marguerite Crawford was a little woman of twenty-five, white, plump, timid, with a light of purity and honesty shining in her eyes that was good to see. She blushed on Mrs. Danville's arrival, and went to fetch her son, a flourishing young gentleman of four summers, that she might have some employment for her hands, which seemed as if they were not at ease lying idle in her lap. And as soon as she saw Crawford's child, Claudia kissed him full on the mouth, thinking that a baby almost the same as this might have been her son, if Fate had so ordained.

"What is your name, little man?"



Very gravely, the child replied: —“ Duncan Crawford.”

And the kissing began again, whilst the eyes of the little mamma shone with pride.

Mrs. Crawford began to talk about her son and heir with the abundant serenity of young mothers; she told of his prowess and proclaimed his talents; she made him read, and sing, and play hide-and-seek. And Claudia's kisses on the little one's soft cheeks grew more and more sad. And after a time she dared kiss him no more. Why was it? Perhaps even she herself could not have said why, in so many words! She looked at Crawford's wife, and felt very much troubled.

She had not pictured this artist's home like this. She had expected to find a vulgar wife and a badly brought-up child, furniture in the worst of bad taste. But there was nothing of that. The wife was simple, sympathetic, and pretty. And by the sound of her voice, by the look of resigned adoration in her eyes when she spoke to her husband, her immense love for Crawford was plainly revealed. And the sight filled Claudia with sadness, and there



was a strange pain at her heart. At dinner she had scarcely any appetite. She had been dwelling upon the immense happiness which would be hers in living, only for two or three hours, amidst the unknown beings and unknown objects which composed Crawford's surroundings. But instead of feeling happy, she was filled with ineffable sadness. Silently, sadly, she looked first at Louise, then at Louis; and bygone memories, sacred and sad, returned to her. There was a kind, friendly note in Crawford's voice whenever he addressed his wife, and his eyes shone with pride every time he looked at his son. Several times he took little Duncan on his knees. He gave him tidbits from his own plate, peeled an orange for him, cracked his nuts, and generally lavished little paternal attentions upon him. As Claudia watched him, she was conscious of a vague feeling of resentment.

After dinner, Mrs. Crawford spoke of her mother, of her childhood, of her native town. And she showed the Danvilles several portraits of her husband, of her child, of her relatives in Stockbridge. She smiled when she exhibited



one photograph of herself, in her white wedding-gown, leaning heavily on her bridegroom's arm. And her voice trembled slightly when she pointed to the portrait of a pale babe, who looked as though it lay sleeping on a pillow.

"Our Jeannette!" she said to Mrs. Danville.

And the latter learned that Mrs. Crawford had had a second baby, who had died two years before. And Claudia could have wept with a full heart.

Then Marguerite — the name of the composer's wife suited her to perfection — caught up a bundle of exercise books in order to banish gloomy thoughts; and she showed her new friend page after page of patiently copied music, transcribed in wonderfully regular notes, beneath letters lovingly rounded.

"Roger's works!" she said.

Then, with great pride, she added, "I transcribe them all myself!"

And later, when the little boy, sitting by his father's side rubbed his eyes with his tired hands, Marguerite excused herself, took the



child up in her arms and carried him off to bed like a good little housewife and mother, very happy to become the humble servant of her son and heir. And Claudia remembered the dear days when she had rocked Louise to sleep.

And whilst Crawford came up to her to keep her company, with a smile on his lips and in his eyes, in which there shone, too, a great light of love, she heard a hesitating, childish voice, a baby voice, which seemed to be saying a prayer, on the other side of the wall. And that little voice was lisping:—

“Dear God . . . make papa . . . and mamma . . . and . . . little Duncan, well and happy . . . and . . . and all the family!”

And Claudia unconsciously stiffened when she felt Roger's foot gently touch her own.

Just then the hall bell rang, and the maid went to open the door to two old people: a man, white-haired and clean-shaven, a pale and bent old lady, whom Crawford tenderly embraced. They were his father and mother,



who made a point of spending Sunday evening with Roger. Having been duly informed that Master Duncan was being put to bed, they both went into the next room to see him, and the sound of their sweet, trembling laughter soon became audible, accompanied by the joyful shrieks of the small grandson.

“Claudia, I love you!” whispered Crawford, profiting by a moment when Danville was going into ecstasies over an album with Louise.

Presently the old people returned to the drawing-room, with their daughter-in-law. And Claudia could not help trembling at the sight of that old attorney, with his severe bearing, and his air of reserve, and at the sight, too, of the little lady with her blue eyes, who seemed the withered image of her good-looking son. She felt as though she would fain have flown from the spot.

Roger, under pretext of showing her an engraving, momentarily placed a sheet of paper beneath her eyes on which he had written, in his bold hand:—

“Claudia, I implore you, come to see me



the day after to-morrow; my wife will be at Lakewood."

After reading the message she looked at him. And with her eyes full of shame she murmured:

"Oh! no! . . . not now . . . never . . . never!"

He could not conceal his bitter disappointment, and it was in saddened tones and with a deep line on his forehead that he walked away to rejoin his father.

Meanwhile, Marguerite had come to speak to Claudia, and with her sweet, pleasant smile, was opening a big blue exercise book in which she had gummed newspaper paragraphs.

"All that concerns Roger!" she explained. "Don't read it. They have said such horrid things."

She spoke of her husband too often, whom, in her artless worship, she considered as a great man. She confided to Claudia's sympathetic ear plans long cherished, marvelous plans which would be realized some day when Roger's comic opera had been accepted.



It was not until a quarter of an hour later that Crawford was able to say to Mrs. Danville, in a window recess:—

“Why won’t you come here again the day after to-morrow? Claudia, I am ill with longing. Come!”

She shook her head and tried to escape.

“But why not?” he persisted.

In order to avoid going into long explanations, she replied:—

“I cannot. I never go out without my husband.”

Having rejoined Mrs. Crawford, she had to promise the latter that she would go to Stockbridge in the Spring-time.

“My mother will be simply delighted to see you,” said Marguerite.

Danville and Louise were talking with Roger. They were telling him, amongst other things, that they would be going to the aviation meet the following day. And strange tears came into Crawford’s eyes.

Claudia saw him coming back to her, and she hardened her heart.



"It is very late," she said, rising from her chair, and trying not to meet Crawford's eyes. She bowed politely to the two old people, and gave her cold hands to Marguerite, saying: "I am at home every Tuesday, Mrs. Crawford. May I hope to have the pleasure —"

Her voice faltered; her limbs felt as though they were giving way beneath her; the muscles of her throat contracted. She did not know that she had left her sentence unfinished. She forced a smile to her lips, and it was as in a dream that she passed out into the hall.

Crawford followed. She wanted to avoid him. But he stood waiting to help her on with her cloak. And suddenly she heard his voice . . . What was that he was saying?

"You are going to Garden City . . . to-morrow . . . with your husband and daughter. Lose them in the crowd in the Pennsylvania Station, as if by accident. I will wait for you outside the entrance in Thirty-fourth Street. I love you. . . . I love you!"

She trembled, walking into the elevator with rapid steps, and she would have been afraid



of fainting on the staircase if Louis' arm had not supported her.

. . . . .

A carriage was waiting at the door. It was raining. Claudia shuddered as she placed her daintily-shod foot on the step.

"What a delightful little household," Danville was saying. "Did you notice Mr. Crawford, senior? He is quite an interesting talker, and the elder Mrs. Crawford is a nice old lady; she looked as if she simply worshipped her son. And young Mrs. Crawford! What a good little soul! A heart of gold, a true heart of gold!"

The carriage was rolling along the Avenue. It was a quarter-past eleven. Mrs. Danville felt the fresh night breeze upon her face.

"Would you like me to close the window, Claudia?"

"Oh, no, thanks!"

She uttered the words in an almost plaintive voice, and drew a little nearer the open window to get more air. She said no more. Louise was chattering about little Duncan.



She was already quite fond of him; she would buy him such a pretty toy at Christmas.

“And we *will* go to Stockbridge, won’t we, Mamma?”

They had arrived home. Louise ran off to bed at once. Louis finished reading a Sunday paper.

“Aren’t you going to bed, then?” he asked, as Claudia slipped into a dressing-gown.

“No, I have a few letters to write. Don’t wait for me.”

She passed into the dressing-room adjoining the bedroom, and when she heard her husband’s peaceful, regular breathing, she uttered a sigh of distress, and all the misery that was in her heart was revealed in her countenance now that she was alone.

She sat down and laid her head in her hands. She would have wept, but could not. Her thoughts were confused, and her head ached with the burden of them. Every moment she caught herself murmuring the prayers she had heard but a little while before on the pure lips of a child. “Please God . . . make mamma and papa happy . . .” She could



not get the touching petition out of her mind. Little Duncan's childish voice was ever in her ears, and she thought of Louise sleeping in the next room — her Louise, to whom she, too, had taught such prayers in the sweet days that were gone. The tears welled up into her eyes and trickled slowly down her cheeks.

“Oh, no,” she said, “I shall never belong to that man.”

And she, who had almost forgotten how to pray, thanked God for having allowed her in His mercy to be present at that little family reunion. For she was cured of her guilty love, absolutely cured! Never again would she allow Crawford's lips even to touch her little finger!

“What utter heartlessness!” she thought, “to pursue me the whole evening with his declarations of love, when his son was praying in the next room, when his mother sat looking at him, when his wife, with tears in her eyes, showed me the portrait of her dead baby girl! What sort of woman does he think I am, to betray the friendship of that good, virtuous wife? To wrest her husband from her now



that I know her, now that I esteem and admire her! I! Oh, he does not respect me any more than if I were an utterly abandoned woman!"

She ground her teeth, angry both with him and with herself. Somehow, she had never imagined Crawford's wife as a virtuous woman, nor his father as a venerable old man; and certainly it had never occurred to her that Crawford's little son knelt down to say his prayers at his mother's knee. She had rather expected to find a vulgar household, which she could have regarded with contempt. She would not have been displeased to find that Crawford treated Marguerite coarsely and insultingly, that the latter had bruises on her arms, and that she joked with suspicious-looking characters at street corners.

Again she heard that voice saying: "Tomorrow, at the Pennsylvania Station, lose your husband in the crowd! . . ." He had dared to say that to her! What sort of man was he?

She felt very much agitated. This Crawford was revealed to her in an awful light. Could a man rob his friends of their wives and



daughters and yet not be a complete criminal? This Crawford, in his own home was a good husband, and a devoted father; his conduct was irreproachable. Was he not in the eyes of everyone a man of honor? And this man gave a rendezvous to wives as he shook their husbands by the hand!

She believed herself to be really disgusted with Crawford, and felt very happy in consequence.

“No,” thought Claudia, “I shall never — never belong to him.”

And to purify herself absolutely, as it were, she unlocked an Oriental cabinet standing between the two windows, and with almost religious solemnity opened a small drawer decorated with mother-of-pearl. It was the souvenir drawer, the drawer of old yellow letters, of faded flowers, of discolored ribbons, of a thousand little trifles, both childish and sublime, which had accumulated there during fifteen years of tender fidelity and simple love, and Claudia leaned over this drawer as if to inhale the perfume of her virtuous past. She turned over the souvenirs with happy fingers,



and it seemed to her that these trifling objects, these dusty relics, filled her soul and body with courage, tenderness, and hope.

“ Oh! why did I not come here before? ” she murmured reverently as she read a few forgotten notes, and inhaled the faint odor of old bouquets. She found a single sheet of paper bearing a date, and underneath this declaration: —

“ Claudia and Louis have vowed, after having kissed this paper, to love each other forever, and ever, and ever! ” And to the words both had added their signatures in a firm hand.

Claudia had been known on occasion to scoff at superstitious women; but she took up that piece of yellow paper, which dated from the first month of her marriage, and resolved that from henceforth it should never leave her person. She spent an hour looking at the contents of this drawer, and every second seemed to make her younger by a day. She lived again in that vanished past; she felt once more forgotten emotions: she was twenty-eight years old, twenty-five, twenty, and she had



never dreamt of loving any other man save her husband; and she had never seen Crawford!

Then, to complete her cure, she opened a large drawer below that sacred to the souvenirs; and from this drawer a strong odor of camphor floated up to her nostrils. There, all that had belonged to the baby Louise was religiously preserved; the little frocks, the little shoes, the little bonnets, all the dear wardrobe of the first years of childhood. No sight is sweeter to a mother who is turning gray than that. Claudia, though she had not a single gray hair yet, experienced an indescribable emotion. Oh! why had she not opened that precious drawer a few weeks ago? A woman would always remain faithful to her husband if from time to time she looked at the little garments his child had worn.

Claudia recognized the first gloves her little girl had ever worn; tiny gloves in white wool, with tassels at the wrist; oh! so small, so small. She had knitted them herself — yes, though half eaten away by moths she recognized them,



and she kissed the glove that had contained the baby hand of Louise.

And she uttered a long sigh when she came across a miniature robe in velvet, with a little leather girdle sewn on to the waist. This had been a gift-gown to Louise after a long illness, a long and terrible illness, which had almost killed her. Oh! the awful memory of it! For a whole week Louise had lain unconscious — had not recognized her mother, had lain quite still, unable to utter a word. And during the first days of her convalescence, her voice had not seemed the same, it had been such a very feeble voice, such a shadowy, pitiful little voice, and even now, at the thought of it, the mother wept. And Claudia remembered how she had gone to church every Sunday for a month to ask the Good God in Whom all mothers believe when their children are ill, that her dear Louise might recover.

“And to think that I could have forgotten that,” said Claudia, bathed in tears.

And the buckle of the little belt, too, found its way into her pocket as she resolved that this also should never leave her. What could



Crawford offer her in comparison with such memories as these? Shame, fear, remorse, all those perpetual torments that confided to no human ear, together with the certitude of being one day discovered; and then death would follow. For she feared her husband would kill her — she knew his violent, jealous nature. Once, when she had been to a dance, he had suspected a man of having touched her shoulder with his lips, and on arriving home he had struck her; and the next minute had fallen on his knees, imploring her to forgive him.

She had loved him for it.

Yes, she knew he would kill her.

And all this would be for the vain pleasure of a kiss; for the perverse sensation of feeling another's embrace; another's arms around her. What blind depravity! Besides, had she not tasted all this with Louis? Could the kisses of any man be more divine than those she had received in the days that were passed? Oh! she had forgotten too much. Had not her husband been as handsome, as loving, and as desirable? Had she not known the most in-



time bliss — had she not thrilled with the supremest joy? And, moreover, had not her husband accorded to her that which a lover would never give her — his perfect esteem and affectionate protection? Oh! how mad, how blind she had been! Crawford was ugly and cold and dull by the side of that brilliant and ardent and clever husband of those bygone years. She remembered the declarations, the caresses, the devotion — above all, she remembered that she had come to Louis practically penniless. Was it, then, by bestowing her affection elsewhere that she was going to recompense such generous goodness? “Never!” she said aloud, and in her simple, childlike revolt, feeling it necessary to confirm her resolution, to envelop all her fine promises with a veil of sacredness, she took up once more the faded yellow paper, before which they had sworn an eternal love — her husband and herself — and beneath that old-time vow she wrote in her fine nervous hand, which had changed a little after fifteen years: —

“This vow endures still, and will endure all the rest of my life.”



And, happy as a schoolgirl, she signed her name, "Claudia," with a firm hand.

Suddenly she looked up with a start.

"Then you are not coming to bed?"

Louis had just entered the room. He drew near his wife, and saw that she had been crying.

"Oh! it's nothing!" she said. And, pointing to the open drawer, full of Louise's dresses, she murmured, "I was . . . I was only *remembering* . . ."

"But it is three o'clock! Come, love!"

"I'm coming at once."

And, taking her husband's arm, she passed into their own room.



## CHAPTER VII

### A FOOL'S PARADISE

First, then, a woman will or won't, depend on 't;  
If she will do 't, she will; and there's an end on 't.  
But if she won't, since safe and sound your trust is,  
Fear is affront, and jealousy injustice.

AARON HILL.

CLAUDIA slept uneasily; she awoke several times. At four o'clock, at half-past four, and again at six; and each time it was with a start that awakened Louis. In her semi-conscious state she heard the rhythmic noise of the street-cleaners' brooms in the street below, the clattering of milk-carts, and here and there the opening of heavy doors; and the daylight hurt her eyes when it streamed through the windows.

There was a slight mist, but above the roofs a rosy gleam appeared in the gray sky. Claudia decided to dress at once. Her limbs



ached, and she felt as weary as though she had not slept all night. As she looked at herself in the glass it occurred to her that she would cut a sorry figure that afternoon at the aviation park. Louise was still asleep. Danville was getting ready to go out, for every morning he visited his offices in Wall Street.

Claudia tried to swallow some breakfast; but she could eat nothing, and the fact upset her very much; her hands trembled nervously; now and then her eyelids twitched. She noticed that she was pale, that her lips were colorless, and that her eyes looked dazed, whilst her head felt heavy as lead.

"You'll come back early, won't you?" she reminded Louis.

"Why?"

It was with an almost irritable gesture that she replied. "Aren't we going to the meet?"

"Oh! yes," he said; then after a moment's reflection, he added, "Suppose we put it off till to-morrow?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "To-morrow we have a luncheon engagement."



"Yes, of course, that's true. Very well, *I'll* be back at twelve o'clock."

Claudia was very anxious to go to Garden City. "What would Crawford think if she did not go?"

"He will think it is because I am afraid of yielding. I shall go and let him see plainly that his attentions leave me absolutely indifferent to him."

Danville was late getting back, and he excused himself by observing:—

"We are always busier on Monday, you know. I had an awful lot of letters this morning."

At lunch Claudia again had no appetite.

"Oh! it's nothing . . . only want of sleep," she replied in answer to Danville's expression of concern.

"Won't you lie down for a little while?"

This suggestion exasperated her anew. Her whole being was quivering with agitation. They must leave the house at one o'clock.

"Do you think there will be a crowd?" she asked.



"To-day? Of course, there is always a crowd on Monday."

The station was packed with people when they got there. There were crowds of automobiles outside every entrance. The Danvilles' chauffeur was about to take them to the entrance in Thirty-fourth Street, but Mrs. Danville ordered him brusquely to drive to the entrance in Seventh Avenue.

"Give me your arm, Louis," she said to her husband as they entered, and she leant heavily on it, feeling as though her limbs were giving way beneath her.

"Where do we go first?" asked Louise.

"To the ticket-window," her father answered.

They passed on through the wide entrance, then downstairs to the place where the Long Island trains were to be found.

"Oh! don't walk so quickly," said Claudia, drawing closer than ever to her husband. She was afraid to look about her; the crowd was increasing and people were almost knocking each other over in their haste.



"Oh! please don't go so quickly," she repeated.

"Why not?"

Almost in a whisper she replied: "It is so easy to get lost in these crowds!"

A clock struck two. Claudia seemed to breathe with difficulty.

"Isn't this atmosphere stifling?" she said, loosing Louis' arm, but after a moment she took it again, and looked at him strangely.

"Louis!" she murmured, gazing at him with her heart in her eyes. They clung closer to each other's arms in the surging throng of people.

Another clock indicated ten minutes past two.

Claudia stopped to get her breath for a moment, and suddenly became alarmed.

"Where are they? . . ."

But she found them again, her husband and her daughter, behind a tall pillar. Nevertheless, the incident made her tremble violently. She felt that she was going to faint.

A quarter-past two!

"The entrance in Thirty-fourth Street?"



This way, Madam," an employé was saying to a woman who stood near her.

When she felt in her pocket for her purse Claudia's fingers did not touch the buckle that had held the tiny belt on the baby dress of Louise.

"Oh!" she said to her companions, indicating a small boy, who stood gazing about him with wide-open eyes. "Poor little soul, he must be lost, it so easily happens with all these people about."

Her head was swimming. She passed two ladies who bowed to her; she did not recognize them. "Dear God . . . make mamma and papa well and happy . . ." Again the words rang in her ears; she repeated them inwardly as she gazed dully at the crowd about her.

"Hello!" exclaimed Louis.

"What is it?"

"Oh! no, I was mistaken. I thought I saw . . ."

"Whom?"

"Oh! . . . who is it . . . Crawford?"

Twenty-five past two!



"Come! We can get our train now," she said suddenly.

She walked on rapidly, straight in front, without once looking back; faster and faster, now to the right, now to the left, speeding on and on.

"Come along! come along!"

Still she sped on with wildly beating heart and dazed eyes, rapidly seeking an exit.

She turned round.

"Louis," she called in a whisper, "Louis! . . . Louise! . . . Oh! Heaven!"

She could see neither her daughter nor her husband. She looked about her, retraced her steps, sought in every direction . . . She could see no sign of them.

Half-past two!

Ah! she caught sight of him all at once, over there in the crowd. "Louis!"

She wanted to shout "This way!" as she raised her umbrella, but she was afraid.

She would attract too much attention. She preferred to rejoin her daughter and husband without any disturbance. But soon she lost



sight of them again. Pursuit seemed hopeless.

She turned and climbed the stairs to the great concourse. Her heart was beating wildly as though it would burst. She turned toward the right and ascended more stairs. She walked toward the door. What was this door? It was the entrance from Thirty-fourth Street . . .

"Claudia!" said a voice in her ear.

And she felt a hand grasp her own. She closed her eyes. She thought she was going to die.

"This way; get in quickly!" continued the voice.

She followed that voice; she placed her foot on the step of the automobile.

"At last!" sighed Crawford, his eyes full of sincere tears of gratitude. They fell into each other's arms; their lips met. The car turned through two or three streets and squares and finally drew up before a strange house, in a sunlit street. Crawford said not a word. He opened the carriage door and got out;



Claudia followed. He went up a staircase; still she followed. With closed eyes she passed by groups of men. Crawford opened a door. For a moment Claudia was mute; her eyes were half closed. Then, "I love you," she whispered.

. . . . .

Mrs. Danville was very well satisfied with her day.

She got home at seven o'clock, and was very indulgent to the two transgressors who had lost her in the crowd at the Pennsylvania Station. She almost forgot to scold her husband and her daughter, and related quite gayly the story of her vain search for them.

The evening passed, hardly different from any other evening, and night came once more to Claudia.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THREATENING CLOUDS

O curse of marriage,  
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,  
And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad,  
And live upon the vapor of a dungeon,  
Than keep a corner in the thing I love  
For others' uses.

*Othello.*

It was the month of June. Eight months had elapsed since that never-to-be-forgotten day when Claudia Danville, obeying a vague, tyrannical impulse, had lost her husband and daughter in the Pennsylvania Station—eight months of passionate love and delirious happiness for Claudia and her lover.

It had been a fine, dry Spring, and every week the two families, who had by now become quite friendly, had taken motor rides together along the leafy boulevards.

One day they went up the Sound on Dan-



ville's yacht. At the entrance to Huntington Harbor they landed on the point. The countryside was a dream of delight; they had an impromptu picnic on the grass, and gathered wild flowers.

But at seven o'clock there was a change. The heavens were overcast, a heavy bank of white clouds floated over the gray sky, and melted into a purple haze. The sky grew darker and the clouds blacker, until they threatened to hide every tiny patch of blue. The sun was setting, and in the west, below the gray-white curtain of a vast cloud, lay a long streak of crimson light, like a bloody sword poised upon the horizon.

Claudia Danville's eyes were fixed upon that blood-red gleam, as she lingered, close to her husband's side, beneath the trees.

"We must hurry back to the boat!" said Danville. "I think we are going to have a storm."

A brief consultation followed. They decided to take the boat and turned in the direction of the point.



Danville headed the procession, whilst Louise and Marguerite followed close behind. They would just have time. Duncan walked between Claudia and Crawford; the poor little boy was very tired, and each of his companions held one of his hands.

Every now and then Danville turned round to hurry them on.

"Be quick!" he said. "I just saw a flash of lightning."

They reached the tender at last. Marguerite was carrying a big bunch of wild flowers, gathered by Claudia and Roger.

"We shall get to the hotel pier without rain," declared Danville, who was a good weather prophet.

For a quarter of an hour, during which little Duncan amused himself by rapidly blinking his eyes to imitate the lightning-flashes, the boat came in gently. It was still very warm. Dusk was falling. The boat forged slowly on with a dull monotonous put-put.

Claudia watched the lightning; each flash was more dazzling than the last. She gazed



into the night, which grew blacker and blacker with every moment that passed.

Suddenly the thunder grew louder, until the hills in the distance seemed to tremble.

"It would be just as well to go below now," said Louis.

Both the ladies protested eagerly.

"Oh! no; I love it!" Claudia declared. "You go if you like."

It ended in all six remaining on deck. As yet not a drop of rain had fallen. Danville sat by Louise, with his back to the shore; opposite them were Marguerite and Claudia, with little Duncan between them. Near Claudia Crawford sat, silently gazing at the clouds.

Suddenly Claudia uttered a loud "Oh!" of mingled fear and surprise.

A tremendous peal of thunder had burst upon them like the roar of artillery, and instinctively Crawford and Claudia clasped hands. Then in the white blinding flash of lightning which followed they saw the pale face of Danville watching them.

Everyone stood up, the shock having caused an extraordinary commotion.



"Let us go down!" said Claudia, with a look of terror. She was thinking less of that terrific peal of thunder than of the look on her husband's face.

Danville still sat motionless.

Mrs. Crawford turned to him with an air of surprise, and asked: "Aren't you coming, too?"

It was quite ten seconds before he realized what she had said, or even that she had spoken to him.

"Oh! yes . . . yes . . ." he replied, quivering from head to foot. And as he followed her down the companionway his knees shook.

The cabin was closed tight. Danville leant against the door. The lightning still flashed, and by its light he looked at Claudia who was no longer at Crawford's side; Claudia who was jumping little Duncan up and down on her lap, with little joyful exclamations. And he passed his hand across his brow, which was covered with sweat.

He stayed there, saying not a word. He seemed terror-stricken. Louise went up to



him and made some remark. Still he did not stir.

Claudia and Marguerite were consulting together. Where would it be best to get off? At the pier? Or had they better wait until the storm passed? Crawford went to ask Louis' advice. The latter looked at his friend with beast's eyes.

It was raining. Here and there, on the surface of the bay, a red gleam moved slowly over the water — the light of a passing vessel. They went on deck again. They had only one umbrella among the six of them, and Claudia refused to remain under shelter herself, that she might cover Duncan, Louise, and Marguerite. They disembarked at the pier, half-drenched by the rain. As they walked along the quay, however, the down-pour ceased, and a violent wind arose. It was half-past nine, and they walked rapidly, reaching the hotel in safety.

. . . . .  
“Good-by! See you again soon,” Crawford said, giving Danville his hand, as they parted at the Yacht Club slip three hours



later. The latter held out his own cold hand mechanically.

And as the Danvilles' cab turned in the direction of the West Side, Louis felt his wife's hand slipped through his arm.

She was full of loving little speeches.

"What's the matter with you to-night?" she asked with affectionate anxiety. "You aren't saying a word. But perhaps you aren't very well after the storm. . . . We shall be home soon. Isn't it weather? What an awful night! Fortunately the rain is stopping. Oh! and the lightning is over, too! What a pity! It was nice on the water, wasn't it? Do you remember that peal of thunder?"

Here Claudia's voice took a deeper note.

"I was so terrified! I quite lost my head! I felt as though I must cling to the boat with both hands! I really thought I was drowning!"

And Danville could not help looking at her searchingly with great, wide-open eyes that had a look almost of horror in their depths. Claudia was apparently unconscious of that scrutiny; she leant more heavily still against



her husband. How very tired she was! And she stretched out her left hand, which was ungloved, and with a little loving gesture, straightened his tie.

When they reached home, she turned to Louis and asked: —

“Would you like anything to eat, dear?”

He answered that he was not hungry.

“Neither am I. Are you, Louise?”

The young girl confessed to a tremendous appetite. But she did not eat much, sitting down to table all alone. Danville had gone to his study to look over the letters which had arrived during his absence. Claudia, having removed her hat, and discarded her walking shoes for a pair of dainty slippers, was looking out of one of the dining-room windows, watching the last faint lightning flashes.

Mother and daughter after listening to the roaring of the wind for some time, and saying little, went to bed.

Danville still sat at his desk. He had opened three or four letters, but had not grasped their contents. Since that terrific peal of thunder, after which, by a flash of lightning, he had



seen Crawford and Claudia clasp each other's hands, his whole body had been trembling with an unnameable dread, an awful fear. And laying his head in his hands, he moaned aloud, a moan of mingled rage and pain.

"Oh! they love each other! My God! They love each other!"

He got up from his chair, and feeling that he must move or go mad, paced rapidly up and down the room. He opened one of the windows; he held up his face to the cool night breeze, with a sigh of relief, as if he hoped that the breath of the storm would drive away the morbid thoughts crowding in upon his brain.

"Why, oh! why, did they take each other's hands?"

That picture was ever before his eyes. He still saw that revealing flash which had shown him his wife and his friend drawing close together with an impulsive, simultaneous movement of fear.

"Does a woman take a man's hand under such circumstances?" he asked himself, "unless she loves him?"



“Oh! the miserable creatures!” he murmured. “If I thought . . .”

He left the window and turned round.

“Oh!” he muttered, below his breath, and stood trembling in every limb.

“Was that you?” he asked.

But there was no reply. He had been mistaken. He was still alone. It was evidently not Claudia, as he had thought. Besides, had he not heard her go to bed? He looked behind the door, and convinced himself that no one was there.

“Oh! no, it is madness to contemplate such a thing,” he told himself. “I should die of shame if I thought she could divine my suspicions. Claudia deceive me? My little Claudia? Absurd!”

And yet . . . the memory of that scene on the yacht!

The thought maddened him, and pressing his hand to his burning forehead, he stole into their room, with his brain once more awlirl with hideous doubts. He walked over to a couch where Claudia's clothes were lying, and



stood motionless, gazing distractedly at the dainty skirts, longing to touch them, and clenching his hands in an effort to refrain from searching the pockets.

Suddenly he heard a faint rustle of sheets behind him. Turning his head slowly, half fearfully, he looked at the bed. The rhythmic breathing of the sleeper fell upon his tortured ear. He hesitated no longer; staggering like a drunken man, he passed into the adjoining room. The first thing that met his eyes was a lady's elegant writing desk, inlaid with ivory. Claudia loved to write there. He stared at it as in a dream; then, almost roughly, with a scared glance towards that other room where she lay sleeping he opened one of the drawers. It contained notepaper, stamps, sealing-wax, and letters. He fingered all these last, his eyes burning, as if he were afraid to look at them. A clock, striking the hour, made him start up trembling like a guilty thing.

"There is nothing under lock and key," he thought. "Evidently . . . it . . . is not



here." He was crossing over to a work-table strewn with skeins of silk, when he shuddered again . . . "Had not the door moved? . . . that door . . . behind him?" He remained motionless, gazing mechanically at a plush frame, wherein smiled the pictured face of little Duncan. "No! after all, nothing had stirred . . . certainly no one had moved . . ."

He breathed again.

"Ah!" . . . he murmured with a sigh of recollection, "the bureau!"

Quickly he returned to her room and found the bureau. All Claudia's little treasures must be there.

He opened the drawers one by one. He found all his old letters, those dear letters, loving, tender, confiding — written to his wife in the days when she had never known of Crawford's existence. He sat down and looked at the faded writing — his own — and side by side with it that of another — that penned by the beloved hand of Claudia. For Claudia had loved him well in those days, so well that she had arranged all these letters in



a most sweet and charming fashion. Lover-wise, she had laid one of Louis' letters against one of her own; each packet was made up in this way, and those good, faithful letters, lying cheek to cheek, seemed to resemble old people who love to talk together, in low, hushed voices, of their vanished past.

Suddenly, amongst the little heaps, he caught sight of an unfamiliar object — something — yes, surely it was something gray — a piece of gray paper, evidently torn off a wall.

“Oh!” he murmured under his breath, “I don't recognize this!”

He took up the fragment of paper, examined it carefully, turning it this way and that, with an air of amazement. What was that in the bottom corner? Was it not a date — traced with a very fine point, a needle, surely?

“October!” . . . He thought he could discern the word “October.” He trembled from head to foot, and felt as though his head was bursting. He was utterly at a loss to explain the origin of this unfamiliar object. It awoke no responsive chord in his memory.



He had never seen a room papered like that.

. . .

“Oh! this is too much!” he moaned.

He rose abruptly, and strode towards the door.

“I *must* ask her,” he murmured, with a frenzied air, “I *must*!”

He passed into the neighboring room, and behind the portière stood a white form, apparently hiding.

Startled, he cried aloud: —

“Is that you?”

And Claudia gave a little answering cry of surprise.

“What are you doing there?” he asked.

“Nothing,” she replied. “I only wanted . . . wanted to see if you were coming to bed.”

They exchanged a hostile glance. Danville felt as though his lips were sealed, as though he simply could not speak of the mysterious gray paper. Besides, what was the use of voicing his secret fears? What would be gained by such a course? What needless misery would be caused if his suspicions were



groundless, and what a vulgar, ridiculous scene there would be if they were true! He remained silent; he dared not even look at her, lest he should read the truth in her eyes. He went back with her to their room, talking of trivial matters, his heart aching with the awful bitterness of doubt.

Claudia followed him. Her voice was soft; it did not sound as if she had been asleep. Perhaps she had only been pretending when he bent over her bed . . . Danville felt an icy chill steal through his veins.

"Had she seen me?" he asked himself, "when I was tempted to search her skirts? Did she see me when I was looking through her desk?"

He closed his eyes, and became more deeply lost in thought. He remembered that several times he had fancied he heard a slight noise at the door. A shudder ran through his frame, and his lips grew pale and dry with the torture of his doubts.

"How the wind blows," Claudia murmured. "It must have awakened me. Is it very late? What were you doing there at this



time of night? Why have you opened the bureau? ”

He felt as though his veins were bursting through his forehead; there lay the gray paper, plainly visible on a packet of letters. What if she were to see it? His eyes grew troubled; he wished with all his heart that he had hidden the accursed fragment of paper. But Claudia's slim fingers had already closed upon it, and, looking up at her husband with a soft, melting light in her liquid eyes, she whispered: —

“ Do you remember? ”

Her voice had never sounded more melodious, and her shoulders, which Danville could perceive beneath the muslin of her night-dress, seemed modeled with a new, smooth freshness. She held up the scrap of gray paper, torn from the wall of a furnished apartment in Sixty-sixth Street, eight months before, and on the same delicate hand there gleamed her marriage ring.

“ Oh! Louis,” she murmured softly, “ don't you remember . . . at Quebec? ”

He heard her words, and even made an ef-



fort to believe her. But, at length, he replied huskily: —

“At Quebec? . . . No, I don’t remember.”

Then she bent down and murmured in his ear: —

“That morning . . . when we were so happy in our love.”

“Oh! did you tear the paper off the wall that morning?” he asked, still incredulous.

“Yes, in memory of that dear room,” she answered.

“But, pardon, Claudia! that room . . . that room was papered in a shade of terracotta.”

“I know,” Claudia replied calmly, “but the inside of the wardrobe was papered in gray.”

“Was there a wardrobe?”

“Yes; papered entirely, as I say, with gray.”

“Oh!” he muttered, still with a dubious air.

“I thought you had a better memory,” she retorted, in a rather hurt voice, as she threw the paper back into the drawer. Then, softening again, she went on: “Never mind! . . . I still think it was worth while.”



“Oh! but . . . Claudia . . . Claudia dearest, forgive me! I did not say — really, I seem to remember it myself now.”

“The wardrobe was papered like this,” she repeated, again taking up the paper. “It was from there I took this little piece; you must realize that I couldn’t have disfigured the wall of the room!”

She examined the gray fragment closely, posing her body in such a way as to accentuate the full moulding of her firm bosom, half-concealed, half-revealed, by the flimsy *robe de nuit*.

“It was in October! Look! I have written the date underneath.” She seemed pensive for a moment, and then laid the paper to his lips.

“Come,” she whispered, “kiss it, my husband. . . .”

He looked at her; then, with a strange sense of uneasiness, closed his eyes.

“Come!” she said again, “Louis. . . .”

He felt the strip of paper quivering on his lips, and saw Claudia’s smile of thanks.

The same terrible doubts once more assailed



him; he closed his eyes, tortured by the same sad thoughts.

“Are you going to bed now?” said Claudia archly.

Slowly, and with difficulty, he smiled, as he watched his wife return the paper to the drawer.

. . . . .

Claudia was undoubtedly ashamed of her heartlessness; her whole being had revolted against the odious comedy, even while she had been acting it. But the one dominating, compelling desire to reassure Danville silenced the voice of conscience, and the means to the end became but a secondary consideration. But now that it was over, how glad she was to forget it all in the belief that she had banished his doubts! And how sweet it was to contemplate these old letters lying before her eyes, these souvenirs of her love. Little by little, a look of grave sadness stole across her face, and again and again she murmured, as she looked into her husband's eyes: “Do you remember this?” The smile which accompanied the tender words was frank, sincere,



and pure, and yet it resembled that other smile, that false, studied, artificial smile with which she had induced her husband to kiss a souvenir of her guilty love. Nature is merciful; for good and bad alike she has the same protecting veil; the false utterance carries just as much weight as the true.

Suddenly Claudia came across a crumpled piece of paper which she snatched up with a rapid gesture. In her repentant mood she blushed — a circumstance which did not escape Danville's notice. It was the artlessly-worded vow they had both signed fifteen or sixteen years before.

“ Claudia and Louis have vowed, after having kissed this paper, to love each other forever and ever and ever!” It was the paper she had taken with her eight months before when she had gone to the Pennsylvania Station, securely armed as she had thought against all temptation. But how powerless a weapon the poor little souvenir had proved! She hid her head on her husband's shoulder when she caught sight of the postscript, added in October: —



“This vow endures still, and will endure all the rest of my life.—CLAUDIA.”

Danville felt his wife's cold lips pressed to his throat.

He looked at her. She was on the verge of tears.

“What is the matter?” he asked hesitatingly.

“Nothing!” she replied, in a feeble voice.

He longed to fall on his knees before her, crying:—

“Oh! tell me if that which I fear is true? Tell me! tell me!”

But he dared not, could not speak; his emotion was stifling him.

He followed Claudia to their daughter's room. The wind no longer whistled round the house, and Louise lay sleeping peacefully, pale in her slumber, her fair hair spread over the pillow like a shower of gold. They gazed at her in silence. Claudia softly smoothed down the sheets and raised the young girl's bare arm, which hung over the edge of the bed.

“Our daughter is very beautiful,” she whis-



pered, as she lightly laid her lips to the low white brow in a maternal kiss. At the words Louis could restrain himself no longer, and with a long-drawn sigh of misery, he stammered:—

“Oh God! oh God! . . . how wretched I am!”

Claudia's heart leaped in her bosom; but her lips remained sealed. Dreading the explanation she felt must surely ensue, she turned away as if she had not understood, and walked back to the study.

At length she found courage to ask:—

“Did you speak to me?”

He closed the door and faced his wife with a look of misery in his pleading eyes. She turned away, but in a couple of strides he had traversed the distance which separated them.

“Now!” he said, “now tell me why you caught hold of Crawford's hand!”

A mist gathered before her eyes. She felt as though she must surely faint. Danville had seized her arm, and she felt his fingers closing round her soft flesh in an iron clasp.

“Answer me,” he repeated.



"Why? Because . . . oh! because I was afraid: and in my fear I thought it was you beside me, Louis."

"Is that true?" he asked.

"I swear it!" she said deliberately.

"Oh!" he cried brokenly, "what a fool I am! What a suspicious brute! Forgive me, my little Claudia, forgive me!"

And, almost sobbing, he laid his lips to hers.

. . . . .

"She lied!" he told himself two hours later, when the pale dawn stole into their room. "She lied! He is her lover!" He had spent the night in thought, and was convinced that he had discovered the unhappy truth. But he was still far from thinking that guilty relations had existed between his wife and his friend. Failing the evidence of his own eyes, he would always refuse to believe *that*. Indeed, the very thought had scarcely entered his head. All that he felt sure of was that Claudia and Crawford were drawn to each other by a sentiment which would speedily ripen into love. "A man and woman do not clasp each other's hands in a storm unless



moved by a powerful mutual impulse," he thought. "They love each other. There has, perhaps, been no formal declaration, perhaps they themselves have not yet realized their position, but a sentiment assuredly exists which I must crush, cost what it may."

Finally he decided to break with Crawford, though he could not quite make up his mind how to effect the rupture.

"And to-morrow," he murmured between his clenched teeth, "it may be too late!"

When morning dawned at last, he asked Claudia:—

"Where are we going to-day?"

"I don't know," she replied.

"But didn't we arrange to go out with Mr. and Mrs. Crawford?" he persisted.

"Oh! yes, of course, we are going to the Metropolitan Museum, aren't we?" she answered.

Louis did not go to the office that morning. He felt too restless and enervated, and when Claudia stood before the glass to put on her hat, he asked almost irritably:—

"What are you going to do now?"



"I'm just going out for a little while," she said.

"Well, I think I'll come with you." He spoke almost timidly; he knew he was half mad with jealousy, and the knowledge added to his confusion. He felt almost ridiculous.

They decided to go to the Park. First, however, Claudia expressed a desire to go over to Broadway.

"I shall be back almost immediately," she said. "You can wait here."

"Oh! I may as well go with you," he objected. "It will only be a matter of a quarter of an hour or so, I suppose?"

Again he felt furious with himself. Why was he so absurd? He could not be always with his wife.

Suddenly, however, Claudia changed her mind.

"Oh!" she said, "I've just remembered that our friends in the Franconia won't be at home. I think they have gone away into the country."

"We can soon find out," remarked her husband.



"Oh! I'm quite sure we shall find nobody there," she replied, for she no longer wanted to call.

Once more troubled, Danville thought: "Is there anything at the bottom of this?"

Then he felt as though he could have pinched himself for being such a churl.

At lunch he ate nothing. His thoughts were all of Crawford, whom he intended to see again soon. Looking around the room he found traces of his rival everywhere. His portrait was on the mantelpiece, his compositions were scattered about the piano, one of his bouquets was in a vase. He had noticed none of these things the day before.

"Where shall we find Crawford?" he asked, when they reached the Metropolitan.

"At the head of the stairs, I expect," she answered.

They found Crawford without the slightest difficulty. Danville took off his hat to wipe his forehead, as it was damp and clammy. He tottered, feeling as though he were about to fall, and tried in vain to collect himself and to reply to Louise's questions.



As he saw the composer coming towards them the blood seemed to freeze in his veins. He bowed distantly, and averted his eyes with disdain. Crawford was explaining and excusing his wife's absence. It appeared that Marguerite had been upset by the storm the day before; she was not feeling at all well, though she would probably be herself again in a few hours.

They passed at random through the brilliant rooms, faintly redolent of paint, for the most part silent. They had paid five or six visits to the Metropolitan, but in that moment neither Louis nor Claudia could have said where they were, or where they were going, or what they were doing. Even Crawford, usually so glib of tongue, seemed as little inclined to conversation as themselves. Once, as Danville stopped before a picture, he thought he caught a significant glance exchanged between the composer and his wife. He turned pale, and stepped between them, whilst his hand closed convulsively over the handle of his walking-stick. Suddenly Crawford greeted a stranger, and exchanged a cor-



dial hand-clasp. "This is my good friend Van Law, whose work you doubtless know," he said, turning to Danville. The latter might have been deaf and dumb. He heard not a word. He vaguely realized that he was introduced to someone, and mechanically raised his hand to his hat.

Crawford went on talking to his friend, without leaving Danville's side. Every time the former stopped to examine a picture Louis involuntarily shrugged his shoulders, for, in all sincerity, he regarded as hideous every picture which won Crawford's admiration. Presently, the latter touched his arm.

"There! that's the sort of thing that always appeals to one," he declared in a tone of conviction, as he pointed to a large picture which hung proudly on the line. Danville contemplated it in silence. It was a colorless, featureless canvas, portraying three or four rag-pickers' baskets.

"What life!" continued Crawford.

"Where?" asked Danville, contemptuously. "In those baskets?"



Crawford's friend trembled. He was a ruddy-faced, unintelligent-looking little man, whose pictures were the admiration of certain enthusiastic young journalists. It was he who had painted the baskets in question, calling the picture "The Rag-Pickers of La Grenelle."

Danville neither saw Louise's blushes nor heard Claudia's significant cough.

"The thing is simply idiotic!" he declared, quite oblivious of the fact that the painter stood by his side. Crawford turned pale, and moved towards Danville.

"Roger!" interposed the painter quickly, taking his friend's arm, "Roger! please take no notice."

"Idiotic!" Louis repeated contemptuously, "absolutely idiotic."

"You are very strange to-day," murmured Crawford, quite abashed.

"Do you think so?" asked Danville haughtily.

Claudia hastily intervened. "Louis!" she said warningly.



"I shall hope, Mr. Danville," resumed Crawford, "that all this is merely some unhappy misunderstanding."

"It is nothing of the kind," retorted Danville.

By this time Van Law, the painter of the unfortunate "Rag-Pickers," had gone scarlet. He had been listening the whole time, gazing at his friend with a stupefied air. Crawford did not flinch.

"Let us go," he said, turning to Danville with a smile. "You are not well this afternoon."

Claudia's husband shuddered; he darted an evil look at the composer, and his hand trembled.

Crawford turned pale now. He read the menace in Danville's eyes, and realized that it was impossible to avoid a climax.

"Mr. Danville," he said as calmly as he could, "when one is in this sort of mood, one usually remains at home."

"I beg your pardon, sir. Since when have you appointed yourself critic of my actions?" muttered Danville furiously.



"I will not have words with you," answered the composer, shrugging his shoulders with an air of defiance. And, taking Van Law's arm, he bowed, and withdrew.

. . . . .

"At last!" thought Danville, when, a quarter of an hour later, he hailed a cab and handed his wife and daughter in. "It's done," he told himself, with a sigh of delight, "it's done, and we shall see no more of Crawford. We shall be as happy as we were before we ever met him!" He kissed Claudia fondly as these thoughts passed through his mind, and then turned to Louise, and kissed her, too, demanding their pardon the while. The tension was relieved; his nerves were calm, and in that blissful moment of reaction he could have wept for very joy.

He was genuinely amazed when Louise apprised him of the real cause of the quarrel.

"What!" he exclaimed, "that gentleman is the artist? the painter of the 'Rag-Pickers'? What a shame! I must go and see him, and try to make him forget my abominable clumsiness. I must have been a blind idiot!"



He looked at his wife. She was trembling from head to foot, but she remained silent.

“Oh! Claudia, aren't you going to forgive me?”

Still she did not answer.

“Oh!” he said, taking both her hands in his, “I trust you. Believe me! You may reassure yourself on that score.”

Mother and daughter trembled. They had not yet viewed the affair in its true light.

“Oh! oh!” they burst out simultaneously. It was only natural that no thought of the precise situation had entered Louise's head. Claudia, perhaps, was thinking of other things.

Danville managed to convince them that there was no cause for alarm. And in any event, he, Danville, was the insulted party.

After a moment's reflection, he said:—

“Will you drive with me to the office?”

Mother and daughter held a brief consultation together, and then agreed to the proposal. Accordingly the taxicab went flying downtown.

“It is not worth your while getting down,”



he said, when they reached their destination.  
“I’ll be back in a moment.”

But in spite of his promise, he kept them waiting nearly an hour.

“Here we are!” he said at last, quite gayly, as he suddenly reappeared. “Our European representative kept me rather a long time. We are doing very well over there, you know.”

He took his seat in the car opposite them.

“How hot you are!” said Claudia, “you look as though you have been running.”

“It is warm in there,” he said simply.  
“The air was stifling.”

During the three-quarters of an hour which had elapsed, Danville had been pacing his private office in a fevered frenzy.

He had determined upon a course of action.

Danville went out at one o’clock on the following day. Claudia performed a hasty toilette. It was her day for meeting Roger. She was going to see him at the Sixty-sixth Street apartment, to see him, to speak to him, and to ask his pardon for Louis’ rudeness.



She was ready at twenty minutes past one, her whole being aflame with impatience. She wondered if yesterday's scene had cooled Crawford's ardor, but told herself instantly that it could not possibly have made any difference; he loved her too well.

They no longer saw each other every day; but that mattered little, for the long-desired, long-anticipated kiss is the most enjoyable.

"How well we shall love each other to-day!" she murmured.

It was ten days since they had met in Sixty-sixth Street, and Claudia longed to see her lover. She hailed a closed carriage, and, following her usual custom, drove as far as the corner of Broadway, where she got out, and walked the rest of the way. In the space of a few minutes she was standing inside the entrance of the apartment house.

"Mr. Jackson has not come yet, Madam," said the hall-boy, to whom Crawford was known as Mr. Jackson.

"He is sure to come to-day," she told herself. And she went upstairs and sat down to wait as patiently as she could. The minutes



passed, there was no sign of her lover. Half-an-hour, an hour; still no sign. She grew restless; a fear she dared scarcely name stabbed at her heart and made her tremble from head to foot.

It was his habit to rap at the door very gently, three times, when he was late. Perhaps to-day she had not heard him. She rose softly and stole to the door, opened it, and found — no one. No! he had not come. She sat down again, nearer the door, which she left ajar, gazing towards it with all her eyes, listening with all her ears.

Still the minutes crept on. It was a quarter to three. He had never been as late as this, and her heart sank with a sickening foreboding. Could it be that he no longer loved her? Had that absurd quarrel put an end to everything?

Suddenly she started up with a little cry. Someone had rung. She rushed to the door, her hopes revived. It might still be Roger.

It was a telegraph boy handing her a flimsy envelope. She took it mechanically, unable to utter a word, as she read: —



“MY DEAR ONE,—I cannot come to-day since I have a sudden and pressing engagement. Could you not quiet Louis’ suspicions? Good-by for the present. I will write to you.

“ROGER.”

For a moment Claudia gazed at the missive with a bewildered air, entirely at a loss to understand.

“A sudden and pressing engagement ” . . .

“Heavens!” she said aloud, for at last she understood something of the veiled purport of the message. “Oh! What will Louis do!”

She fell on to the edge of the couch; and for fully five minutes she sat there motionless, her eyes fixed upon the floor, her hands locked together in an agony of impotent despair.

“He will kill him! Kill Roger!” The words dinned in her brain until she thought she was going mad.

Suddenly she straightened herself, and got up.

“No! no! no!” she cried aloud, “not that! not that!”



At the door she hailed a hansom, and paused a moment before she gave the order, wondering where she ought to go first.

Almost breathlessly she murmured to herself, "Perhaps my husband has returned? Driver! Number — West Seventy-eighth Street, quickly, please; as quick as you can."

"Louis! . . . Roger!" The two names kept breaking in upon her thoughts.

"Louis! . . ."

"Roger! . . ."

She whispered them softly, whispered each with the same breathless terror and adoration. Her imagination ran riot. She saw a corpse lying white and cold upon the ground. But which of those two loved ones? . . . which? . . . Louis or Roger? It was equally horrible to contemplate either of them . . . still and cold . . . Oh! why could she not die herself? She would willingly have given her own life for either of them.

"My Louis!" she said to herself, as she thought of the generous husband, the faithful friend, the father of Louise. And "My Roger!" she murmured, as she dwelt upon



the image of the handsome gallant, the young artist, the manly, virile lover.

The one she adored with all her heart; the other with her whole being.

“Wait a moment!” she said to the cabman. “I may want you again.”

She paid her fare, and passed up the wide staircase of her home. She learnt nothing new, however, for Danville was absent, and Crawford had not come.

“If your master should return,” she said to the valet, “ask him not to go out until I come back.” And she hurried away.

“Driver! To the Subway Station!”

Once more she started in pursuit. Entering the subway, in a half hour she was at Louis’ office.

Claudia caught sight of an employé. “I believe my husband is here?” she said with a little catch in her voice. As she spoke, Danville’s secretary had come forward, and replied respectfully:—

“No, Mrs. Danville. He has just gone out.”

She uttered an exclamation of profound dis-



couragement, and, without waiting to hear more, hailed a taxicab.

"Number — West Forty-fourth Street," she said, and the chauffeur started.

"I shall go to Roger's house," she told herself. "What do I care about the conventions, or yesterday's quarrel! They must not meet. Nothing else matters save that; and I will not allow it."

"I shall ask to see Marguerite," she thought, "and find out from her whether Roger is there or not. I shall say: 'Your husband is going to quarrel with mine; either may be injured; even killed!' Marguerite will weep, and all will be well; for by her tears, mingled with my own, we must and shall prevent Louis and Roger fighting. We will even take our children, if necessary, and follow them."

These melodramatic phrases surged rapidly through her brain, as the car dashed along.

Arrived at Crawford's, however, the maid declared that no one was at home. They had all gone out — the whole family.

Mrs. Danville gazed at the girl incredulous.



lously; then, growing desperate, she cried wildly:—

“Are you quite sure?”

“Oh! of course, Madam!”

A sound reached her ears from the interior of Crawford's apartment, which seemed to Claudia suspiciously like that of little Duncan's voice. But, wearily and hopelessly, pale with grief, she passed downstairs. “Evidently,” she told herself, “the girl has received her orders. Roger had foreseen everything, and forbidden them to allow me to enter.”

Her eyes filled at the thought. Slowly she reëntered the cab. The chauffeur enquired where she wanted to go, and she replied with a vague, mechanical shake of the head. She did not know where to go now. It was raining hard. And she clasped her hands together with a stupefied air as she felt the large, warm drops fall rapidly, one after another, on to her gloves.

Suddenly she trembled from head to foot, as a thought occurred to her:—

“Oh! my husband must have taken precau-



tions, too, to prevent my seeing him! I remember now! I am sure I saw his walking-stick in the stand outside the door. How silly I must have been! But I will go back and find out for myself whether he is there or not."

This time she was more prudent. Arrived at the establishment, she entered furtively by the side-door reserved for the use of the staff, and rapidly threaded her way through the dark and intricate passages. A group of clerks saw her, and made way for her to pass, but she made no enquiries of them. Her breathing was labored, her eyes shone, and her lips quivered with anxiety. She recognized the door of her husband's office; sure enough, there was his walking-stick outside.

"Louis!" she cried, as she opened the door and rushed into the room.

Her voice was scarcely audible for emotion, but she had found him, and, bursting into tears, she threw herself upon his breast.

She could not speak, for her conflicting passions were stifling her, and for some moments she could only cling to him silently, sobbing as though her heart would break. Then she



looked into her husband's eyes; she touched him; she took his hands in her own, and pressed them nervously to her bosom.

"Louis! *my* Louis!" she murmured brokenly.

Danville rose, and drew her into a little room leading into the hall.

"What is the matter? What on earth is the matter?" he asked, pale with alarm.

"Oh! you wicked, wicked man!" she cried. "I don't know how you dare ask me such a question! What is the matter, indeed! Do you think that I don't know that you are going to accuse Crawford of some dreadful thing? Oh! How can you?" she cried, taking his face between her hands.

He tried to protest, but she would not listen.

"Oh! it is no use! I know everything! I was here a little while ago, but your secretary told me you were out. It was not true. You had forbidden him to let me pass. You see it is quite useless to deny anything. But it is all over now, and you are not going to be foolish. I swear it, and you shall see that I



mean it. You are coming back home with me. Get your hat and stick at once. I won't let you stay here. I won't!"

She was very excited, shaking him as she spoke, and forcing him to get up.

"My dear, this is absurd!" he expostulated, trying to defend himself. "Come back again in an hour if you like. But for the present I must remain here. In an hour I shall be at your service. Come now, Claudia! in one hour —"

At this moment the secretary entered, betraying his surprise at seeing Mrs. Danville in the room.

Louis trembled at the sight of his secretary, while Claudia's eyes were fixed alternately upon her husband and his employé.

"Mr. Danville," stammered the man, "they are —"

"Very well, I'll come at once," said Danville, dismissing him with a gesture.

But the movements and the expression of the secretary made Claudia suspicious.

"What is the matter?" she said in a reso-



lute voice, as she walked towards Louis.

"Nothing," was the answer. "Just wait here for me one moment."

"No; I shall come with you!" was the obstinate reply.

"It is quite unnecessary. I shall be back immediately."

"I shall come with you," she repeated, and she followed him out of the room.

"Now, Claudia, I beg of you —" he remonstrated, taking her arm.

She slipped from her husband's detaining arm, lifted the *portière*, and ran back into the office.

Conviction suddenly dawned on her as she recognized Louis' lawyer standing with a stranger in the adjoining room.

"Oh! gentlemen! gentlemen! This is too bad!" she cried. "Go away! I implore you. It is simply a question of a miserable little misunderstanding. I am sure of it! Besides, Louis is now convinced of it himself! You must see that under such conditions he will not need you. What would become of me and my daughter? Oh! gentlemen! I



implore you to go away!" she begged, clasping her hands and sobbing aloud.

They attempted neither to lie to her nor to resist her pleading. They stared at Danville standing stupefied and helpless beside his desk, and, knowing that he could find them at once at his attorney's office should he desire, after all, to see the affair through, they withdrew, in order not to prolong so painful a scene.

"Saved!" cried Claudia, as she threw her arms around her husband's neck. "Oh! Louis, I have saved you! Louis! *my* Louis!"

She could have danced for joy as she smiled up at him through her tears.

"Oh! thank you for obeying me," she said, "thank you so much!" She threw her arms around him; she kissed his hands; she would have gone down on her knees to him to express her gratitude.

"If you only knew how I have suffered!" she cried. "If you only knew! . . ." She sobbed aloud, as Danville took her gently into his arms. There was a grave but tender light in his eyes as he looked into her own.



“How good you are,” he murmured, “how very good!” and then added simply, “I am very happy.”

Tears filled his own eyes. All the suspicions of the previous day had vanished at sight of his wife's grief. How could he doubt her now? His heart swelled with joy unspeakable, as he told himself: —

“She has always loved me. She has never loved anyone but me.”

“Claudia,” he said, “you did a good thing, the right thing, in coming here to-day. I shall never forget this hour; it is the sweetest I have ever known. I, too, have suffered, Claudia, these last two days . . . my own, dear Claudia!”

She lowered her eyes, the better to enjoy her triumph, or the better to relish her delight . . . or . . . was it only to hide her eyes from her husband's too ardent gaze? In this indescribable moment, when, standing heart to heart, each quivered in the other's embrace, was she still voluntarily acting a part, still playing a *rôle*? She gasped for breath, feeling an impulsive longing to cry aloud the



whole truth, in a long pent-up outburst of loyalty.

She took her husband's hand and laid it against her cheek, while great tears fell slowly from her eyes.

"And to think that I suspected you! You, my own true Claudia!" he continued. "If you were kind, you would punish me with your own dear hand."

She turned her head away, tightly compressing her lips in order not to obey that almost unconquerable longing to speak, to tell him all. For in that moment she repented with all her heart and soul, and felt as though she must curse that sinister, tyrannical lover, whose memory still haunted her, and whose kiss, alas! seemed worth the sacrifice of duty.

She hid her face in her hands.

Suddenly she looked up again, and said almost eagerly: —

"Would you like to travel this summer? We could start to-morrow, with Louise, and get right away from here."

"Why to-morrow?" he asked, his face clouding over again.



"I . . . I don't know!" she answered, hesitatingly. "I feel as though I am afraid of New York, as though I must get away for a few months, as soon as possible."

He kissed her closed eyelids.

"Oh!" she exclaimed joyfully, "then it is settled? We can go? You are sure?"

"Yes; but not to-morrow."

Her face fell.

"Oh! Louis, why not?"

"Business reasons, dear. It is really quite impossible."

"But you know very well they can manage without you for a few weeks at this time of the year," she objected.

"But, Claudia dear; I must be here to-morrow."

They exchanged a long look of distrust, and Louis was compelled to lower his eyes.

"It is because of Crawford," cried Claudia. "You have already arranged to meet him. I know you have! Don't deny it! I shall never forgive you. Louis, tell me the truth!"

He raised his eyes again, and kissed her on



the forehead. Then, in a low voice, he said:—

“I will not deceive you, Claudia. At such a moment I am not capable of the least dissimulation. You have guessed the truth; we are going to meet to talk over certain matters to-morrow.”

Her face became livid.

“Darling, you mustn’t be alarmed. It is nothing. The meeting-place was fixed this morning. The two gentlemen you saw just now were my lawyer and his. That’s all.”

Claudia stood motionless, staring at her husband and trembling from head to foot.

“But don’t upset yourself, that’s a good little wife,” he went on soothingly. “You know what it means—merely a talk to clear the air. Besides, sweetheart, you must remember that I wished to avoid any publicity, anyhow. Crawford is an artist, and those people take such things differently. It is a good advertisement for them. We must come to an understanding. The newspapers would be full of it. My employés would blush for me.



Come, little woman, be my good, reasonable Claudia. Give me a kiss; that's right!"

She could only look at him with terrified eyes. So they were going to meet, after all! Louis and Roger! She sank helplessly into a chair, laid her elbows on the table, and let her head fall heavily between her arms.

. . . . .

Louis returned home at two o'clock on the following day. At the sight, his wife fainted, and for some little time remained unconscious. Even when she recovered, it was quite a minute or two before she could speak or move. Then she closed her eyes again, and silently kissed her husband.

The meeting had taken place that morning. Claudia could not control the shudder which ran through her frame as she listened to his explanations. She was terribly over-wrought, and the previous night had feared she would lose her reason. At three o'clock in the morning she had taken her husband into her arms and begged him to give up the conference. And now, when she saw him before her, she



could have cried aloud for joy. A profound happiness filled her heart.

“Do you know that we are reconciled?” said Danville.

Claudia started. A deep flush suffused her cheeks, and she could not control a shower of happy tears. Before her eyes there rose once more the image of the lover, superb and glorious, the magnanimous lover, who could forgive and forget.

“Oh!” she said, trying to suppress the eagerness in her voice, “how did it come about?”

“We settled our difference in short order. I told him that the misunderstanding had lasted long enough.”

“Then he does not bear malice?” said Claudia.

“Not at all,” replied Danville. “He is a good fellow.”



## CHAPTER IX

### LOVED AND LOST

Weep no more, lady, weep no more,  
Thy sorrow is in vaine;  
For violets pluckt, the sweetest showers  
Will ne'er make grow againe.

THOMAS PERCY.

SPRING had returned. Ten months had passed away since the eventful quarrel that had brought in its train consequences unforeseen by Claudia and her husband. To her they had been ten months of agony, for Crawford, cured of his *grande passion* by this narrow escape, had speedily given Claudia to understand that all was over between them. For ten long months she had been compelled to endure in silence, to maintain the attitude of a friend — or rather, of a mere acquaintance — whilst her whole being was crying out for the lover who was dearer to her than ever before,



now that she had "loved and lost." The warm breath of April was unfolding the tender green buds, the sun smiled down upon the fertile earth, and Claudia's heart grew lighter with a dawning hope, for Crawford was coming much more frequently to the house. Perhaps that poor, dead love, she thought, would once more burst into flower at the call of spring.

"How good it would be to love now," she told herself.

One Sunday morning she did a thing she had not done for many months — she attended Mass. She made a solemn vow to attend Communion every month if she could only regain possession of her lover. Not for a moment did she regard this proceeding as sacrilegious; she did not realize that she was beseeching Heaven to let her live in sin, for her love for Crawford no longer weighed upon her conscience.

She began to believe that God was about to grant her request. Crawford was still paying them frequent visits; they saw him once or twice every week. He even submitted without any irritable looks or gestures if Claudia,



lightly, almost timidly, drew closer to him, when Louis and Louise were preoccupied. True, his muscles involuntarily stiffened, but his face betrayed nothing of his secret repulsion beneath its pleasant smile, and he let Claudia have her way.

While the fine weather lasted, he proposed various united family excursions; and on the quiet country roadsides or in the green meadows Claudia often cast adoring looks at the man who had been her lover, and whom she still loved as passionately as in the long ago.

She thanked God for answering her prayers, for everything seemed to promise a revival of her guilty love. She would cheerfully have sacrificed a year of her life to give Roger the slightest pleasure.

Formerly, her mind being free, though her heart was enslaved, she had indulged in candid expressions of opinion when Crawford talked to her about music. She did not always agree with her lover on matters of art, and did not hesitate to tell him so, if only for the pleasure of teasing him by contradiction. But she no longer took the liberty of criticising



his views, for fear of offending him, and spoiling all. She invariably echoed his own opinions, and moreover, with perfect sincerity, for her mind seemed no longer capable of independent thought. It was as if she saw with the same eyes, and reflected with the same brain, as her lover; she was a part of him. She had become his plaything; she was mute and submissive in his presence as an attentive dog. And in the same degree as she was timid and subdued with Crawford, she was haughty, unjust, even tyrannical with others.

During these family excursions, for instance, an instinctive suspicion haunted her whenever she saw Crawford walking at Louise's side. She felt sick at heart whenever her daughter conversed at all freely with him. Though she would have been unable to explain the nature of her anxiety, strange ideas floated at times through her tortured brain. Louise was nearly seventeen . . . and Crawford . . . he was not over-scrupulous . . . Could it be . . . ?

But such suspicions, she told herself, were too absurd. It was only natural that Roger



should like Louise, as natural as that she should like little Duncan. It was quite within the order of things that a sincere lover should feel affection for the child of his loved one. Friendship for the daughter was but a proof of his love for the mother, and Claudia hugged this consoling thought to her bosom.

Crawford became more expansive as his demeanor grew more assiduous. Once more he confided to Claudia his hopes and fears. One evening he drew her aside and confessed that he was very worried about money, and that his financial situation was far from promising. He proceeded to explain that he had built all his hopes on a comic opera, which had been refused, however, by every manager whom he had thought it would suit, and who was capable of doing it justice. As a consequence, Marguerite was selling her property at Stockbridge.

Claudia was moved to pity. Her poor Roger! How she longed to help him! She asked him what he intended to do.

He told her that he had made up his mind to give lessons in singing and the piano, but,



even then, of course, the pupils would have to be found.

Claudia promised to procure him some, and on the following day she went to see him, accompanied by Louise, whose musical education still left something to be desired. Crawford expressed his gratitude, and at once consented to become Louise's teacher. He gave her a daily lesson — sometimes at his own apartment, sometimes at the Danvilles'. The young girl declared herself delighted, and Claudia enjoyed many a pleasant quarter of an hour listening to her daughter's chatter about "that kind Mr. Crawford."

The composer had not deceived Mrs. Danville — he was no longer well-to-do. The Stockbridge property had been sold, but most of the proceeds had been swallowed up by hungry creditors. Marguerite had given up the apartment and moved to a smaller one, in order to reduce the rent, and now she saw the time approaching when it would be necessary to reduce it still more. It was impossible to cut down expenses in any other direction, and Duncan had just reached the age when it was



necessary to send him to school. The music lessons did not add much to the family exchequer, for Louise was the only pupil worth considering. Crawford would have to look out for something else.

He would have liked a position as orchestra-conductor in a theater, but could not hear of a vacancy. Once more he went to Claudia, and confided in her.

She had influential relations, and sought their aid; but they could do nothing for him. As it happened, however, she had heard that a conductor was required in a Philadelphia theater, though she did not want to inform Crawford of the fact — Philadelphia was so far away! She dared not think what would become of her if Crawford left New York. But she committed the indiscretion of keeping Louis in touch with Crawford's affairs, and the latter mentioned the Philadelphia vacancy to his friend. At first Crawford refused to contemplate the idea, but, being at the end of his tether, and utterly unable to continue his former style of living in New York, he eventu-



ally resigned himself to the necessity of applying for the post.

The Philadelphia theater would re-open in September. The manager was a friend of Claudia's, and Crawford begged her to write him a letter of recommendation. At this request, Mrs. Danville became as pale as death, and timidly refused.

He could not understand it, and proceeded once more to explain to her his precarious situation, telling her that he would be obliged to accept anything whilst waiting for a better opportunity to present itself.

He was persistent in his endeavors to obtain this last favor from Mrs. Danville. "Claudia, my dear Claudia!" he pleaded, "if you still love me a little . . .?"

Claudia could not restrain her tears. "Philadelphia is so far!" she said brokenly, then blushed with confusion at this involuntary betrayal of her emotion, burst into sobs, and turned away her head. Crawford looked at her in silence, and in his own eyes there was a suspicious moisture.



"Oh! Roger! Roger!" she sighed. "Then it is all over . . ." And, drawing nearer to him she revealed a tear-stained, haggard countenance. Sobs still shook her bosom as she raised her beautiful, tragic eyes to his. He kissed her hair, and was afraid he would begin to weep himself. Of course, he no longer loved her, but then, how could he help pitying her?

. . . . .

The next day he started, alone, for Philadelphia and returned two days later. Nothing had been definitely arranged, but the manager had been very encouraging, and had practically promised him the post.

When she heard the news Claudia nearly fainted in her consternation. Sick with anguish, feeling that Crawford was escaping her forever, she racked her weary brain to think of some means of keeping him in New York.

One fine morning her whole being quivered with a new-born hope. She had remembered that some time previously Danville had entertained one of the directors of the Metropolitan Opera Company at luncheon. Per-



haps this gentleman knew of some opportunity for an artist of Crawford's qualifications. Roger was a finished violinist. Why not make some inquiry, at least?

She sounded Danville, putting the situation to him frankly. Their friend Crawford was in need of money; here was a practical means, perhaps, within their reach, of coming to his assistance. It was an opportunity they ought not to neglect, especially in view of the fact that he was making such an accomplished musician of Louise.

Danville offered no objection to approaching the director. In fact he called to see the man the following day. And to Claudia's joy another week brought about Roger's engagement at an excellent salary, as a regular member of the Metropolitan staff of artists.

The Philadelphia position was hastily declined. Roger would remain in New York to his own and Claudia's delight.

Their reasons for elation, alas! were far from identical. But of the inner workings of her lover's mind Claudia was ignorant. Her own passionate desire blinded her to all else.



## CHAPTER X

### YOUTH WILL BE SERVED

Where the virgins are soft as the roses they twine,  
And all save the spirit of man is divine.

LORD BYRON.

CRAWFORD remained in New York, and Claudia was radiant with hope. At least she would still be able to feast her eyes on that dear face; and surely, oh! surely, he would be grateful to her! At all events, she thought, he would not be able to avoid the reflection, "This woman is entirely devoted to me; she has indeed been good to me, and done me a real service." And the logical conclusion would — must be — "I ought to love her for it." Oh! the thrice-blessed day when he would again lay his lips to hers!

The young composer had not accepted the position without scruples. He was pleased to make numerous objections and judicious re-



serves, in order to safeguard his dignity. But as Louise joined her entreaties to those of her parents, he eventually gave in with a good grace. He devoted himself whole-heartedly to the work of rehearsing every day at the Opera House, and fulfilled his duties with enthusiasm. But he told himself privately that it was a task unworthy of his abilities, and promised himself that he would soon throw it over if anything better turned up. In the meantime, he would not give up hope in regard to the Philadelphia appointment; there would be time to write to the directors, a month after the re-opening of the theater.

. . . . .

It was the beginning of June. New York houses were closing one by one. Danville had again taken the villa at Cedarhurst, which they had occupied the preceding summer, and as Mrs. Crawford no longer had her place at Stockbridge Claudia invited her to spend the season with them.

"Oh! yes," said Louise with an exclamation of pleasure. "You must come, Mr. Crawford. You will see how pretty our cot-



tage is. And there are strawberries! Besides, if you don't, I shall forget all you have taught me unless I continue my lessons in the country."

She was speaking quickly, eagerly, looking frankly at her teacher out of her beautiful blue eyes, as pure and as blue as opening flowers. Her complexion was exquisite, and her golden hair was bright and dazzling as the sun itself. As she stood there blushing with a young girl's mingled enthusiasm and modesty, Crawford accepted the invitation, and the two families found themselves once more united at Cedarhurst during the first warm days of July. Claudia's heart beat high with happiness. At last, she told herself, she was to gather the fruits of her patience and generosity, for she was going to pass long months in company with Roger. She would eat at the same table, sleep under the same roof, live the same peaceful, divinely monotonous existence.

. . . . .

Mrs. Danville could not sleep for joy. The Crawfords' room was next to her own, and sometimes in the stillness of the night she could



hear a calm breathing, which she felt sure must be Roger's.

The days became delightful. Danville was often absent, for his partners were in Europe, and he was indispensable at the office. One day, Crawford also being in New York, Claudia went with Marguerite to the room which had been allotted to the latter. Both ladies sat working. Mrs. Crawford's maid was not always equal to the tasks of the little household, for Duncan was very troublesome and very mischievous, and needed constant supervision. Marguerite, therefore, was often obliged to come to the aid of the servant, and to-day she was examining her husband's linen, repairing here, sewing a button there. Claudia dearly wanted to join her in the task, and had at last summoned up courage to ask permission to help. And there she sat, her unaccustomed, unskilled fingers painfully executing darns in Crawford's linen.

But it was a pleasant task for her. She saw the bed where Roger had slept. She saw scattered about little articles which reminded her of her former lover. She touched the shirts



he had worn, and tasted an intoxicating pleasure.

Louise sat at the end of the garden, reading. Duncan was having a fine time astride a rocking-horse.

Suddenly Claudia thought she heard a burst of laughter in the distance. No doubt it came from the garden. "Who could it be? Louise? Yes; it was certainly Louise's laugh. But what was she laughing for, all alone?"

However, Mrs. Danville thought no more of the matter, and continued her inspection of Crawford's waistcoats, handkerchiefs, and neckties.

Louise laughed again.

Claudia leaned out of the window, but the paths and lawns were practically hidden by the foliage of the tall trees.

"My daughter must be reading something very interesting," she remarked to Mrs. Crawford, as she resumed her seat.

It was six o'clock. In the distance, on the clear surface of the ocean, a tug-boat whistled, dragging in its wake a long trail of lighters, looking like small black dots.



Suddenly Claudia heard Louise speak.

"Then there *is* someone there," she thought.

Again she rose, looked through the window, hesitated, and then, without saying where she was going, she quietly left the room and went down into the garden.

"Has Mr. Danville returned?" she asked of the manservant.

"I have not seen anyone, Madam," was the reply.

She walked slowly along, took a pen-knife from her chatelaine, and cut half-a-dozen large roses, which she intended to put on the piano. Then she moved away towards a clump of cedars, behind which was a rustic seat, but Louise was not there. Claudia followed a winding pathway bordered by a high hedge, when suddenly she heard Louise's voice at her side.

She turned.

Louise was speaking to someone; someone whose words did not reach Claudia. The latter was embarrassed; she held her breath, and endeavored to discover who the other person was, but in vain. Then she cautiously parted



some of the branches in the hedge, which obstructed the view, and saw her daughter fixing a rose into a gentleman's buttonhole. It was Crawford.

Claudia grew pale as death.

"Oh!"

The word was a low-drawn moan, which escaped her white, parted lips. Her eyes opened wide in amazement.

Louise was very near to Crawford, and his ardent eyes were fixed upon the young girl's face.

Mrs. Danville saw her lover try to kiss her daughter's hand.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE WAY OF A MAN

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more!  
Men were deceivers ever;  
One foot in sea and one on shore,  
To one thing constant never.

THOMAS PERCY.

WHEN Claudia Danville asked herself why Crawford had deserted her, she doubtless had forgotten that thirty-three summers had passed over her head. There might be other reasons for his coolness, but this was undoubtedly the prime factor in his change of attitude.

Claudia had loved him too long — with too great a passion, too devoted a loyalty. He had experienced an involuntary yearning to escape from her, and the eagerness of this longing increased in the same degree as did her own excessive adoration. Time, unbending and inexorable, had done the rest.



In short, Claudia, in the desire to appear more youthful, had revealed too many wrinkles in an over-powdered face; and Louise had looked very pretty by her mother's side — pretty, fresh, and attractive, with the virginal bloom of her seventeen years.

Crawford had thought of Louise with respect, if a somewhat ardent young man of Crawford's type is capable of respectful thoughts in the presence of a young and desirable girl. At all events, passion had not immediately devoured him, and he had cherished certain scruples.

To begin with, did Louise love him? Crawford made it a rule to keep his lips clean when the young eyes that looked into his were clear and innocent. He varied the nature of his "declarations" according to the nature to which he desired to appeal. These were his tactics, and, hitherto, they had always been crowned with success.

Now Louise's eyes spoke a language that was by no means easy to read. Young girls must be mistrusted. Curiosity is very much akin to love, and a sweet young girl may be



conscious only of the former sentiment when the pursuing lover imagines her consumed by the fatal flame. The most *blasé roué* or accomplished flirt is often deceived in this respect.

Therefore Crawford felt it necessary to make a careful study of the eyes of Miss Danville, which study he pursued so assiduously that on most nights he saw them even in his dreams. There comes a spring-time when the young girl blossoms forth into womanhood as rapidly as the lily bursts into bloom. Beneath the benign influence of three months of sun, angular outlines may be rounded into delicious curves. Louise had undergone this pleasing transformation. Was he to blame, thought Crawford, if he had become aware of the fact?

At first the greatest reserve characterized his conversation with Louise. Nothing could have been more in accord with the conventions — or his own well-appreciated interests. But he took a singular pleasure in seeing the young girl, in hearing her speak, in being near her.



Crawford acted on a principle which is often well-founded; if he thought so much of her, she must inevitably come to think a little of him.

Thus it was that he had only been too happy to pay frequent visits to the Danvilles, and had welcomed with secret joy the prospect of becoming Louise's teacher. In regard to the latter, his plans were not as yet fully matured. He realized all the delicate subtleties of the situation, and the manifold dangers surrounding this mad love. He even made earnest efforts to escape from this new thralldom, and at this juncture he would have exiled himself in Philadelphia without any over-poignant regrets.

But things had changed since then. The spring had come, and when for the first time Louise appeared in a light Empire gown, which displayed the nape of her neck, and permitted him a glimpse of a triangle of snowy whiteness beneath her chin, he became conscious, with mingled rapture and dismay, that he was madly in love.

It was solely in the hope of seeing her more



often that he had accepted the position in the Metropolitan Opera Company, and for the still sweeter prospect of being near her every day that he had accepted the hospitality extended to him at Cedarhurst.

The first days of his stay in the country had seemed the sweetest in his whole life. Louise liked to be with him; he had no doubt on that score. But what he was unable to discover was whether the girl thought of him in the light of a tender suitor or merely as an agreeable companion. His opinions varied on this subject. At one time, on seeing Louise blush, he would fancy that the heightened color betrayed the existence of a lover's emotion; at another, her joyous laugh was quite enough to prove to him that it was but the gayety of an innocent child. These disappointments, however, only increased his ardor.

He cherished no naïve illusions in regard to young girls. He knew that the most carefully nurtured maidens were often the most expert in the art of love.

However, he believed Louise to be as pure of imagination as she was heart-whole, and



this conviction stimulated him strangely. He loved her almost with piety. Probably before no other, so much as before that girl, had he desired to go down on his knees. His passion was so violent that it took a purely chaste form. Louise was so beautiful. Her youth was like the perfume of a flower-filled cottage.

Now, on this afternoon in July, when Marguerite and Claudia were working together at the villa, Crawford had left New York at five o'clock to hasten back to Cedarhurst. Noiselessly, knowing that the young girl was reading at the end of the garden, he had sought her out before going into the house to remove his hat.

And whilst Claudia watched him, pale with anguish, Crawford sat talking by Louise's side.

"Oh!" cried the young girl suddenly, "how strangely you are looking at me! I feel as though you are *touching* me with your eyes!"

Crawford's eyes were, indeed, fixed upon her, with a hungry gleam in their depths. Louise's involuntary exclamation expressed without exaggeration the startling intensity of that amorous gaze.



The young girl rose instinctively, walked away to the boundary wall, and leant her elbows upon it. Without a word Crawford followed suit; the carefully-guarded attitude was abandoned, and he took no pains to conceal the fact.

Suddenly Louise turned aside, exclaiming: "Who is there?"

There was no reply, and no one came in sight.

"Did you not hear footsteps, Mr. Crawford?"

He had heard nothing; he had not even turned round when Louise had exclaimed. What did he care? If either his wife or Mrs. Danville had appeared at that moment, he would have ignored them. He was consumed with love. All vows, all old loves, were forgotten.

Crawford and Louise re-approached each other, their elbows touching, each looking into the other's face.

Then, suddenly, after looking for three seconds into Crawford's eyes, so full of meaning, the young girl drew back slowly, without



a word; in her own eyes there dawned an expression of fear, and she moved away quickly towards the house, without once daring to look behind her. Crawford remained where he was, trembling from head to foot in the violence of his excitement. This pretty girl should and must be his. How? when? where? It was upon the solution to that problem he was now concentrating all his intelligence. He did not disguise the situation from himself. Louise never went out alone; Mrs. Danville watched over her always — Mrs. Danville who he knew still loved him.

“Before everything else, I must throw dust in the mother’s eyes,” he told himself. It would doubtless prove a difficult undertaking. Claudia seemed already to have her suspicions. She did not like Louise to take a lesson at his flat, for instance, and instructed a severely prudent maid to accompany her daughter on these occasions. Moreover, when the professor entered into conversation with his pupil, the mother invariably had the appearance of spying upon them.



“She will never care to leave her alone with me,” he concluded.

He walked on a little. Not a minute had elapsed since Louise had vanished. He still fancied he heard her light footsteps speeding along the gravel paths. Still trembling, he, too, moved towards the house.

“How am I to manage it?” he murmured below his breath, with burning eyes.

Suddenly he stopped.

Claudia stood before him, with a bunch of roses in her hand — Claudia, pale, immobile, leaning against a tree.

He paled in his turn, and instinctively recoiled.

Then, recovering his *sang froid*, conscious of a definite plan forming in his mind, he walked towards his former love, took her in his arms, and kissed her.

Claudia thought it was a dream. She could not speak. She could only stare at her lover with troubled, uncomprehending eyes, while a cold shiver swept through her frame. What did that kiss mean? Had her own eyes deceived her, a little while ago, behind the



hedge? Was she going mad? Had she hallucinations?

“Then my little Claudia loves me no longer?”

Claudia still looked at him, her eyes full of a nameless fear. She stopped to lean against the hedge, and from between her parted lips her breath came with a sharp, hissing sound, as if all the pent-up anguish of that year of suffering was mingled with the tumultuous rise and fall of her aching breast.

“Can you pardon me, my little Claudia?” Crawford continued. “Would you care for us to resume that same dear life as of old?”

From Mrs. Danville’s eyes fell two great, glittering tears.

“You love me still!” she moaned. “Oh! you are good to me.”

He was silent, as he watched the features, contracted with pain, of her whom he had once loved so well. And though his heart was full of the new love, he was moved.

Claudia had drawn closer to him, and, still incapable of speech, her wide-open eyes gazed into his face with a stupefied air.



He drew her away — they would be seen. He led her gently along the boxwood-bordered paths, out of the garden, and with slow steps they walked on, into the woods beyond. Crawford involuntarily bent his head. Perhaps, in spite of his habitual skepticism, he was not feeling too proud of himself in that moment.

The sun was sinking behind the murmuring trees, and shed light rays upon them which seemed like soft, warm kisses on their eyes.

After a little while, still gazing at her lover, Claudia murmured one word: —

“ Roger! ”

She pressed his wrists nervously with her trembling hands.

Then, somewhat confused, he suggested: —

“ Would you like to meet me the day after to-morrow, at two o'clock, at the Waldorf? ”

She gave him a long, troubled smile. Transfigured, she murmured once more, “ Roger! ”

She clasped her hands, and uttered a low moan of happiness. Then, sinking down on the trunk of a fallen tree, she laid her head in her hands, and wept unrestrainedly. They re-



mained there for some moments. She took one of Crawford's hands, and kept it gently clasped within her own, clinging to it desperately when he made a movement to withdraw it.

Knowing that he was pardoned, convinced that she was once again completely at his mercy, and could refuse him nothing, he recovered his self-possession, and began to speak.

He began by talking commonplaces; then, strong in his own omnipotent influence over the submissive mind of his old lover, he passed heedlessly, without skill or discretion, to the subject that was obsessing his own brain.

"By the way," he said, "the piano at the villa is a very poor one; I shall ask your permission to take Louise to-morrow to my flat in New York, to give her the usual lesson."

Mrs. Danville raised her head, and regarded him steadily.

"Oh! there will be no need to go to New York every day," he continued, tearing at the green moss growing in the fallen tree-trunk, "two or three times a week will suffice. It



is really impossible to do anything with so worn-out a piano. As far as to-morrow is concerned, it will be a simple matter. Louise could leave here with her father at one o'clock. Mr. Danville could bring her to my flat at three, and while he went on to the office, I could give my lesson. If necessary, your maid, whom you have left in New York, would be able to fetch Louise an hour later."

Claudia's eyes were still fixed steadily on Crawford's face. She had gradually loosened her hold upon his hand, and suddenly, throwing her arm over her eyes, she allowed a cry of disgust to escape her.

She longed to spit in his face, and cry aloud:—"Monster! Go away! May I never see you again! Never!" But she could not speak. Something in her throat was choking her. She thought she was dying. She remained there motionless on the fallen trunk, staring straight before her, like a thing of stone.



## CHAPTER XII

### LOVE UNQUENCHED

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.

*The Song of Solomon.*

WHEN she returned to the house, Mrs. Danville kissed her daughter tenderly.

"Come, Louise," she said softly, "I want to speak to you."

She shut herself up in her room with Louise, and covered her face with silent kisses. Louise could not understand it.

"Why, mamma, what is the matter?" she asked. "You make me feel quite shy."

Claudia did not reply. She felt an overwhelming longing to fold her daughter to her heart.

"The matter is," she said at last, "that I love you dearly to-night, that I am happy to look at you, to hear you, and to kiss you. That is all."



Her mother watched her furtively. She seemed to see for the first time the perfect lines of her shoulders, the full curves of her young bosom.

She sat musing. Yes, it was true that Louise was now seventeen, and, after all, her question ought not to have so astonished her. The child was growing into a woman. Claudia experienced a painful thrill at the realization of that all-important fact.

She did not close her eyes that night, and the next morning she breakfasted in bed. Mrs. Crawford came to see her, and Claudia only replied to her sympathetic enquiries in monosyllables. She was torn by conflicting longing to show her the door and to press her, with sisterly pity, to her heart.

She asked incessantly for Louise. She wanted to know where she was, whom she was with, and what she was doing. She had her bedroom changed in order to sleep near her daughter. She concerned herself about the young girl more and more with every day that passed.

A week passed in this fashion. Then, one



afternoon, she went downstairs, and strolled out into the garden. She knew that Crawford was away. She looked ill, and her smile was painful to see. She felt a curious, oppressive sensation, and could not eat. It was as though she had received a deep internal wound, an incurable wound, which, all her life long, would cause her relentless, unabating anguish.

Oh! the fervor with which she vowed to devote herself to her husband! She longed to take immediate interest in financial affairs. Yes, she told herself, she had decidedly neglected the practical side of her existence too long. This would provide her with a splendid source of distraction. She even asked for one of Louis' financial journals, she wanted to examine the quotations, she accompanied Louis to the office, she had the organization of the company explained to her, she amused herself with figures and studied the Stock Exchange.

And then she awoke to find it all in vain. All her efforts were powerless to keep her mind off the forbidden subject; all her vows



proved but idle words. It was useless attempting to reason with herself. She could not get Crawford out of her thoughts; think of him she must. She realized with despairing conviction that she had no other interest in her life; she was incapable of diverting her thoughts into another channel. The man whose love had been so dear to her was now even dearer than before, and seemed to have taken entire possession of her, body and soul. Mind and heart were his; over neither had she the least control. Claudia Danville no longer lived, save in Crawford. Life had no other attraction.

Crawford was ignorant of the torture his former lover was enduring. He had not known he was being watched on the day he paid court to Louise. He was certainly far from imagining that Claudia had clearly seen through his despicable strategy, half-an-hour later, when he had suggested a rendezvous to the mother in order to effect another with the daughter.

He continued to enjoy his peaceful holiday in the country at Cedarhurst, and seemed per-



fectly at ease with himself and the whole world.

Mrs. Danville fully expected to see him flush. She thought he would be covered with shame — the day she consented to speak to him — but he did nothing of the kind. The composer still carried his handsome head as high as ever, and it was Claudia who flushed in his presence.

Crawford had eyes for no one now save Louise. He found her always beautiful, whether she was dressed in silk or cotton; whether her white throat was hidden or revealed.

Claudia looked on despairingly. "I can do nothing!" she told herself in anguish. "My God! nothing! . . . nothing!" She felt as though she were going mad; there was nothing left her but to grow old, and with heart and mind forever in torture slowly to wait until her hair was gray.



## CHAPTER XIII

### A WOMAN'S FRAILTY

What mighty ills have not been done by woman!  
Who was 't betrayed the Capitol? — A woman!  
Who lost Mark Antony the world? — A woman!  
Who was the cause of a long ten years' war,  
And laid at last old Troy in ashes? — Woman!  
Destructive, damnable, deceitful woman!

THOMAS OTWAY.

SUMMER was drawing to a close. September was approaching. The woods were strewn with a carpet of yellow leaves; the trees were sighing in the wind.

One morning Mrs. Danville entered her daughter's bedroom. Louise was in the garden, Crawford was in New York. Claudia looked at the various objects scattered upon the table, opened the wardrobe, examined the little rack which did duty as a book-case, found some letters in a bureau, and read them through, with rapidly dilating nostrils. Presently she uttered an exclamation of mingled



surprise and dismay; between the pages of a book she had found a faded rose. What was this? she asked herself. What did it mean? And as she continued to look at the withered flower, she trembled.

There was a cruel little gleam in her eyes as she took the rose away with her into her own room. "Ah!" she murmured, as she sank into the chair, "What did I say? I knew it—I knew it!" She rose abruptly from her chair, feeling a need of movement. She left her bedroom and went down into the garden. She found a rustic seat, sat down, and tried to remain still, that she might think. She shivered a little, and then moved away to another seat. From there she could see Louise, who was reading a little distance away. She looked at her for a long time, until she could endure it no longer. With every nerve in her body on the rack she walked rapidly back to the house and regained her room. Pacing up and down behind her closed door, her hands clasped wildly over her burning forehead, she saw visions that brought a light into her eyes which was not good to see.



Why should she guard her daughter so carefully? Why feel such alarm for her safety? Was it not probable that she already loved Crawford? What significance was attached to that faded rose? Was it not a souvenir of love? Had not several months elapsed since Louise had grown so pretty, so desirable? Why, then, need she further torture herself? Had she not already seen Louise alone with Crawford? What had they found to say to each other then? Could they not have kissed each other then, if they had so desired? Crawford was not violent. He did not believe in making love by force. Besides, Louise was of an age to reason for herself. What would have happened if she had been an orphan? and the most carefully-guarded girls often find the same opportunities. "Oh! yes," she told herself passionately, as she thought of that strict surveillance of the past two weeks, "I was good! I was very good! Either she does or does not love him. If she loves him, I can do nothing. They are bound to meet some day or other, and any attempt I might make to crush their love would only make it revive.



And if she does not love him, why should I not let her go to his apartment to-morrow at the time he proposed? ”

“ Oh! no! ” she cried aloud, “ I am going mad! Never that, my God! never that! ” She sponged her burning forehead, and threw herself on the bed.

An hour or two passed. She rose, went downstairs into the music-room, and seated herself at the piano, and softly, sadly, from her trembling fingers came the melody of the “ *Song of the Roses* ”— Crawford’s love token two years ago at Quebec.

With a smile of pain, Claudia murmured softly — “ Quebec.”

She was in a reverie.

Suddenly she said aloud: — “ This piano is out of tune. That isn’t an ‘ F.’ It sounds like an old tin can. Why, of course, Roger is quite right. This is a horrible piano! ”

She left the music-stool. Her brain was reeling. She felt as though she were dreaming with wide-open eyes. Yes, she must certainly be dreaming. In the center of her forehead there was an unbearable sensation of heat pro-



voked by the continual circulation of a fixed idea.

She passed her hand across her forehead and looked with dazed eyes at the piano. Of course, Louise's ear will be spoilt if she tries to sing to that tin can. It is ridiculous to attempt to give lessons with a piano like that. Louise must go to New York.

Crawford had a splendid piano in his apartment in New York. And, as a matter of fact, Louise had to go to town the next day, in order to be fitted for her new gown. Absorbed in these reflections, Claudia paced up and down the room. Sometimes she murmured disjointed phrases, and looked at the clock. "It is annoying, but Louise must go alone to the dressmaker's. The two maids are indispensable here, and, as for myself, I cannot go. Pooh! She can stop with her father."

She felt a slight giddiness. She sat down and shut her eyes. The chairs and tables seemed to be circling around her. She stood up, and looked towards the sea, bathed in golden light.



She groped her way blindly towards the door. She stumbled against something, and it was almost with amazement that she discovered the keyboard of white and black keys at her side. "Oh! yes," she murmured, trembling from head to foot, "this piano is so worn out, and yet Roger would actually have allowed Louise to sing to-morrow to the accompaniment of a thing like that. What could he be thinking about?"

Mrs. Danville went out into the garden again, walking with slow steps, seeming scarcely able to breathe. She was quite cold. She did not feel the ground beneath her feet. An invisible force seemed to push her along. She found Crawford sitting on one of the garden chairs; the sun had set, a clock chimed in the distance. Silently Claudia sat down by his side; the sky was veiled with the tender gray of twilight. "I quite agree with you," said Claudia, in a voice which she hardly recognized as her own, "our piano is absolutely useless."

She bent her head a little as she spoke; the words seemed to scorch her throat as they left



her bloodless lips. "Louise has to go to New York to-morrow," she continued softly, "with her father." Her eyes were burning. Claudia was afraid that she would weep tears of blood.

A red glow hung over the world, like the glimmer of a distant fire. With dry, pale lips, in a voice that was scarcely more than a breath, Claudia murmured, "I shall not be able to go with her. I shall not be going to New York until the day after to-morrow. I expect to be at the Waldorf." Crawford turned his clear eyes towards her; Claudia's own eyes met them and interpreted the gleam in them aright. She bent her head again, and, very softly, glad to feel the shelter of the friendly dark, she said: —

"If you think you ought to give Louise a lesson to-morrow at your apartment —"

Crawford did not flinch — he was looking at Claudia's hand, which shook slightly in the shadow; he dared not look into her face. The moon appeared, its red disk rising over the tree-tops.

"Very well," said Crawford, meaningly.



“To-morrow I shall see Louise in New York; and the day after to-morrow . . . I shall see you.”

A long-drawn sigh of distress escaped Claudia's trembling lips. She drew her lover's head down to the level of her mouth.

“Oh! God!” she breathed.

And then in her eyes shone the light of undying despair.



## CHAPTER XIV

### DISCOVERY

Better trust all and be deceived,  
And weep that trust and that deceiving,  
Than doubt one heart, that if believed  
Had blessed one's life with true believing.

FRANCES ANNE KEMBLE.

ON the morrow Crawford started from Cedarhurst at ten o'clock. He was lunching in New York with a party of journalists. He bade everyone good-by, and then turned to Danville and said, "So it is arranged you will come to get Louise at four o'clock?" And to Louise, "Till later, then."

. . . . .

It had just struck one. Claudia stood immobile in her room, her hands clenched, her bosom heaving wildly, a prey to torturing reflections. Suddenly she shivered.

"Miserable creatures!" she cried aloud.

Yes, she could see them both, her lover and



her daughter! In spite of walls and stones and distance, she could see them. . . . She could hear them. . . . "Oh! no, no, no!" cried Claudia, "never!" But there was no remorse in that savage cry; it was the anguish of a jealous lover — the mother, jealous of the fresh youth of her child. She rushed into her dressing-room, hurried into a gown, put on her shoes and hat. In five minutes she was ready to go out. "Never," she said, her breath coming in gasps, "the miserable creatures!" Her clenched hand trembled. In a paroxysm of suffering one word issued from between her chattering teeth, "Never!"

She took a small revolver from her husband's desk. "Oh! I shall kill him," she muttered. "I shall kill him! I no longer love him, I now only want revenge." She thought of all that she had done for him: the services rendered, the kisses bestowed; she thought of all the torture, of all the shame of those two years.

"Yes, I shall kill him."

She thought above all of the future.

No! in spite of tears and prayers — in spite



of all her entreaties — in spite of all that he had owed to her — Crawford no longer loved her. He would never love her more. It was all over.

She felt as though her heart turned over in her breast; she felt her love change to hatred. She began suddenly to heap execrations on herself. Crawford! She wanted to spit in his face, since she no longer had the right to kiss it. Had she not already hated him for a long time without knowing it?

Ah! she was going to repay him now for all the insults, all the suffering, all the baseness. She was going to become independent, proud, virtuous. She was going to sever that unclean bond which had bound her to this man.

“ Kill him! Let the world be my judge — they will know that I avenged my daughter, and will acquit me.”

. . . . .

She reached the station at a quarter after two. A train was just due, and Claudia, unhesitatingly, impelled by the intensity of her hate, hurried up the steps. As she took her seat she murmured, “ I shall arrive in time.”



The train drew into the Pennsylvania Station at three o'clock.

Outside the station Claudia hailed a taxicab and gave Crawford's address.

"At last!"

As she rang the bell of Crawford's apartment, one vision — a vision of shame — was before her eyes. Locked in each other's arms, she saw them . . . those two.

With the cry of an animal in pain, she pushed at the door, as Crawford himself opened it. "My daughter," she cried. "Monster! where is my daughter?" Her eyes sought vainly the familiar form. The hall was empty — she ran into the drawing-room . . . the dining-room . . . the bedroom . . . No one . . . no sign.

"Louise!" she called in anguish.  
"Louise!"

Louise was not there.

Mrs. Danville was too excited to hear Crawford's explanation. Louise had gone out alone some minutes after having arrived. She was now at the Danvilles' apartment. But Claudia did not understand. She did not see



the amorous chagrin that filled the eyes of her former lover. She did not divine that Louise had never loved Crawford, and that instead of yielding to his prayers, she had at once fled trembling with alarm when her professor had attempted to kiss her.

Drawing her revolver from her pocket, the mother rushed at Crawford. "Monster," she repeated, "Monster!" No other word left her lips, and it was accompanied by a hissing sound that distorted her lips frightfully. She tried to fire at Crawford, violently agitating herself into a mad, clamorous fury. Crawford kept back, seized her wrists, and with a turn of the hand snatched away the revolver.

Claudia's rage increased. She contorted her body in one supreme effort, and seeing herself disarmed, drew out a hatpin, and dashed at him again.

"Claudia! what is the matter? You are going mad. Claudia!" he cried again as he ward off the blows, "I swear to you that Louise is not here! I swear to you that she is still innocent. Do you hear?"



But she was tearing at him now with her nails.

“Claudia!”

It was all he could do to defend himself.

And then — perhaps to quiet her, perhaps to prove to her that he found her beautiful thus — he kissed her.

Claudia sprang at him with added fury. She did not believe in the sincerity of that kiss. Her beautiful hair had fallen about her shoulders in the struggle.

But Crawford, the *blasé*, was not acting. He, indeed, found her desirable, this new Claudia, this woman who had always been so humble, so timid, so devoted. Never before had her hair seemed so black; never before had the curves of her supple form appeared so perfect.

“Fool!” he murmured, as he snatched her up in his arms. “Little fool!” And his voice was low and caressing.

“Leave me alone,” Claudia shrieked, “I hate you — do you hear me? I hate —!”

But Crawford’s mouth sealed her own, as



he carried her, struggling vainly in his powerful arms, to the drawing-room.

“Little fool! —”

. . . . .

Claudia felt as though the earth had opened, and she was sinking . . . sinking. . . .

. . . . .

“Thank you, porter!” said a man’s voice in the hall.

Crawford leapt to his feet.

“Probably they did not hear me ring,” continued the voice, “because of the music.”

“Danville!” murmured Crawford, turning pale.

Claudia felt a shudder of despair sweep through her body.

“Danville! He has entered with the duplicate key my wife left with the porter!”

Danville had rung, in fact. The lovers had heard nothing. Then, when the porter intimated that Mr. Crawford was at home, Danville had entered.

“Oh! let us fly!” cried Claudia. “We are lost!”



There were two light knocks at the drawing-room door. And before Crawford could rush forward to barricade it with his body, Danville appeared.

Crawford instinctively snatched up the revolver he had wrested from Claudia and waited, with an ugly look on his face, his lips apart, showing his fine white teeth, like an animal at bay.

Claudia screamed with terror, and buried her face in her hands.

Danville shivered.

It was so unexpected, so agonizing, that he seemed rooted to the threshold. His eyes dilated painfully. Not a sound escaped his white lips. In vain he tried to raise his arms.

Slowly, slowly, still going backwards, he staggered away.

And Claudia thought she heard him fall in the vestibule.

. . . . .

Meanwhile Louise was waiting for her father in Seventy-eighth Street. At half-past four she saw him arrive; he had the face of a corpse.



“Well!” cried the young girl, “you *are* late, papa.”

But Danville did not seem to hear. He went into his room without a word, and Louise remained alone in the little *salon*.

When a quarter of an hour had elapsed she grew impatient.

She went to her father's room, and saw him, standing upright, behind his desk.

Danville turned round to see who was there.

His eyes were red and swollen.

The young girl approached him almost timidly.

“Papa, what are you doing there?”

Then Danville took her hand, raised it to his quivering lips, and, in a low, broken voice, letting his tears fall unheeded, he murmured:—

“Oh! my Louise! My little Louise!”

She stood looking at him in tender amazement.

“You are miserable, papa. Won't you tell me why?”

He had sunk into an arm-chair, and gently he drew her to him.



“My little Louise! My dear little Louise!”

That was all he said, and he continued to weep, and to look at the young girl. It was a long, strange look, as if he were seeing her for the first time.

“My little Louise!”

“Don’t you want to tell me why you are crying, papa? Oh! it is not kind. I will never tell you anything again, when I am unhappy.” She smiled as she spoke, and he kissed her. She tried to get him to speak. He still looked at her, and occasionally his chest heaved with a great sob.

“Papa, dear, it is five o’clock. Aren’t we going back to Cedarhurst?”

He shook his head.

“No?”

“No,” he said, and his voice was full of pain. “We shall stay here.”

“Good gracious! But why? What will mamma think?”

He made an indecisive gesture, as if to close the young girl’s lips.

“Can’t you leave me alone?” he moaned.



“ Oh! no, no, papa! I *must* know! ”

He folded her to his heart, and closed his eyes.

“ Go to your room now, Louise. It is because I love you, dear, that I cannot speak.”

. . . . .

They slept in New York that night.

On the next day, Wednesday, they did not go out at all.

Danville made no attempt to seek revenge. It would have been a useless, if not a childish, proceeding.

He had not attempted to kill Crawford when he had surprised him alone with Claudia. Perhaps in that moment he could not have avenged himself even if he had desired it, for his arms had been paralyzed. And, upon reflection, he could not have been so blood-thirsty.

Nothing was effaced by murder.

Danville knew that his wrong could never be righted; there was no balm for his suffering. He knew that in twenty-five years — if it was given him to live so long — his heart



would still bleed from the wound it had received that day.

Contempt played even a greater part than wisdom in his decision to leave Crawford unmolested.

He had not been able to realize the extent of his misery all at once. Long days must pass before he could grow accustomed to his trouble. It had been too cruel, too brutal a shock at first.

But as the relentless hours passed by, and that eternal human reed of hope sprang up which gives birth to that philosophy of resignation, without which existence is impossible, Danville found himself unconsciously probing the wound and indulging in an introspective analysis of his grief.

Occasionally he would take Louise's hands in his own, and pass them gently over his beard, which was growing gray.

The girl was becoming alarmed.

Why did they not return to Cedarhurst? And, oh! why did not mamma come back home if she was still in New York?

Danville knew not how to reply. He felt



he had not the strength or the courage to dissimulate; his tears had already betrayed his sufferings.

He could only kiss her repeatedly, while he murmured helplessly: —

“ My little Louise! My little Louise! ”

And whenever the door bell rang, he caught his breath, as if he were afraid he might not hear the voice of the person who had entered.

When Thursday came, and still brought no sign, Louise mingled her tears with his.

Then her father spoke to her softly, entreatingly. “ Louise,” he said, “ I am going out for a little while. Promise me you will stay here. Promise me you will not even go out on the balcony. I shall be back soon.”

Louise promised wonderingly, and he went out, experiencing a sensation akin to amazement when he felt the warm rays of the sun upon his face. He glanced mechanically at the passers-by as he turned towards Central Park West. .

He went to the station, and purchased a ticket to Cedarhurst.

Arrived at the villa, he hesitated, not know-



ing what to do next. Finally, he stole into the garden, and hid himself behind the wall.

Raising his head, he saw that every window in the house was closed, whilst not a sound was to be heard.

Danville remained thus for a long time. When anyone passed, a shudder darted through him. Presently he recognized his valet. Then, seeing himself discovered, he went towards the house.

He opened the gate with a nervous gesture, and gazed with timid eyes along the garden paths. On the gravel he saw the marks of his own footsteps, made two days before when he had started for New York with Louise.

The house had a curiously dismal air, and looked uninhabited. He entered. The cook came into the hall, and there was a note of surprise in her voice, as she asked: —

“Monsieur will be staying here to-day? Madame and Mademoiselle are still in New York?”

Danville listened mechanically, but did not reply; he only stood looking at the servant with eyes full of anxiety.



Then *she* had not returned to Cedarhurst either!

He was afraid to enter the drawing-room. He bent forward in a listening attitude. He fancied he could hear a child's footsteps overhead.

He returned to the vestibule, his shoulders bent, his head bowed. And as the servant had gone out, he remained there, motionless, dreading lest one of the doors might suddenly open.

Presently the cook returned.

"And Duncan?" he asked in a feeble voice. It was so feeble that the woman did not hear him.

"And Mrs. Crawford?" he inquired then, in a little louder voice.

"Oh! yes, Monsieur; I was forgetting! She told me before she left to give her kindest regards to Monsieur."

"Oh! and Duncan?"

"Poor Duncan! Madame was afraid he would soon grow tired of Philadelphia after Cedarhurst."

"Oh!" said Danville again, turning pale.



"When did they go?" he asked, with his eyes on the ground.

"Oh! they started at once. Monsieur Crawford got back here at five o'clock on Tuesday. Madame told me he had received a telegram from Philadelphia appointing him orchestra-conductor. I don't know where. It was so urgent that all the packing was done by six o'clock, and they were all at the station by half-past. But surely Monsieur knew? Since Monsieur met Monsieur Crawford in New York the day before yesterday? Perhaps Monsieur has heard from them again?" she ventured.

Danville listened eagerly.

So they had gone! He was in Philadelphia with his wife and child — his wife, who had assuredly suspected nothing.

Danville rose, breathing more freely. He no longer felt that dread of looking about him; the house seemed no longer to oppress him like a heavy weight.

For a moment he remained with bowed head and unseeing eyes. Then he pulled



himself together, took his hat and stick, and went slowly towards the garden gate.

“Monsieur will not be dining here?”

He stood still.

“No,” he replied quietly, without turning his head; and then went on again.

“Monsieur will be here again to-morrow?”

“Yes . . . perhaps . . . to-morrow.”

“Alone, Monsieur?”

“Yes; alone, I think!”

He opened the gate, passed out into the street, and took the return train to New York.



## CHAPTER XV

### ALL IN VAIN

The Moving Finger writes; and having writ.  
Moves on; nor all your Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

*Omar Khayyám.*

TWO hours later he gave a discreet ring at his own apartment.

The maid answered his summons. He dared not ask her if anyone had called during his absence, and passed slowly into his study.

Silence reigned supreme. Louise ran to meet her father. "Oh!" she said, "it is you; I thought it was mamma."

He shuddered, the word made him feel as though every drop of blood had left his body. He looked at his daughter's lips, as if to assure himself that those two syllables had not died away in their passage.



"I am getting tired of being here, you know," cried Louise. "I should be happier in prison!"

"Very well! We will go out!"

"Our two selves?"

"Yes."

She wound her delicate arms about his neck. And, suddenly revealing her beautiful blue eyes, full of tears, she pleaded, "Oh! do tell me where she is?"

Danville drew her head down upon his breast.

"Papa! where is she? What is she doing? Why doesn't she come?"

His voice was almost drowned in a great sob, as he replied:—

"I don't know."

Louise raised her head and stared at her father in terror.

"You don't know?"

"No, my little Louise."

And as the young girl's face grew white as death, he took her hands in his, and murmured not daring to raise his eyes:—

"No, I don't know at all. You must accus-



tom yourself to a painful thought. . . . You must accustom . . . .”

“ Oh! what do you mean? ”

“ My little Louise. I love you dearly, dearly. Louise, you must not think that I want to give you pain. Oh! no, no! But — oh! don't listen to what I am going to tell you! — Louise, be my brave, good girl. . . . Your mother . . . is not at Cedarhurst; your mother is lost . . . your mother —”

The girl was staring at him in stupefaction, with wide-open eyes. She was so white that she scarcely seemed to live. Danville took her face between his hands, as if to prevent the words from entering her brain with too brutal, too sudden a shock.

“ Your mother may have met with a gang of ruffians — one never knows — the streets are full of rogues, and the police are badly organized. There would be nothing astonishing in that.”

He had raised his head. He was not looking at his daughter; he was speaking in a hard, metallic voice he did not recognize as his own.

“ Oh! *My God!*” cried Louise, “ and you



stay here, doing nothing! And you had told me nothing! Let us go and look for mamma. Quick — quick — we must enquire. Are you quite *mad*? Oh! *My God!* How long has she been lost? *My God! My God!*”

She hurried away to dress. She put on her hat.

“Come, come now! Let us look for mamma! Oh! we *must* find her. Come!”

She was crying as she ran. She went on to the balcony, and looked wildly about her in every direction. Then she went out at once, dragging her father with her. Danville allowed himself to be led. He consented to interview the police immediately; he consented to look closely at the people who were passing on foot and in carriages; he watched the tramways.

The next day they went together to Cedarhurst. Louise wandered through the garden, calling “Mamma! mamma!” in heartrending tones of appeal. Several days in succession they searched, they enquired, they appealed.

It was all in vain.

Once, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and



Thirty-fourth Street, Louise thought she saw her mother. But the person who resembled her disappeared in the crowd before she could move.

Then, in despair, the young girl asked herself if she ought not to go into mourning.

She spent her days in reading and weeping; she studied all the newspapers, but never a word did she find concerning the lost one. Neither did they receive any news from the police-station.

Little by little Louise acquired the conviction that her mother was dead.



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE RECKONING

O Death the Healer, scorn thou not, I pray,  
To come to me: of cureless ills thou art  
The one physician. Pain lays not its touch  
Upon a corpse.

ÆSCHYLUS.

A WEEK passed. Louis still went to Cedarhurst once a day. He stooped a little, and scarcely spoke a word.

One evening, when he was returning home, he saw a woman standing, motionless, at the corner of the street, apparently waiting for someone. She was dressed in black, and Danville thought he recognized the outlines of her form. He passed close by and looked at her. Dusk was falling, and he was not sure if he knew her face. Soon, however, he heard the woman walking behind him. He continued his way.



“ Louis! ” said a feeble voice.

Danville did not stop. He walked on at random, towards Central Park.

“ Louis! ”

The woman in the black gown was not walking behind Danville now; she was at his side.

“ Louis! ”

Danville entered the Park, turning rapidly down the first path he encountered on the right.

“ Louis! will you let me see Louise? ”

He looked at her then, and stood motionless, feeling as though his limbs were giving way beneath him.

Claudia had been afraid to return home after the terrible discovery, and knowing that Crawford had started for Philadelphia, she had taken a room in a hotel on Broadway. She had obtained some money from her lawyer, and had spent her days behind the drawn blind of her window, watching the street in the hope of seeing her daughter pass. And that evening, having seen her husband, she followed him, timidly, at a distance, like a very humble dog.

She trembled a little beneath Danville's



gaze, in this lonely, deserted path; she drew back a little, clasped her hands, and said again, in her sorrowful, timid voice: —

“Will you let me see Louise?”

He shook his head, without uttering a word, bent his head, and began to walk on again.

It was cold. They heard the little leaves trembling in the dark shrubbery.

Claudia still followed her husband; and once again came the plaintive murmur: —

“Won’t you let me see Louise?”

He walked on, keeping his eyes fixed upon the ground, compressing his lips, as if he feared some sound might escape them; he turned this way and that.

Still Claudia followed.

“Louis!”

He walked back to the entrance of the Park, and watched the long row of lamps light up. It began to rain. Claudia was approaching him once more; she was almost at his side, and Danville saw her shrunken face, marred by the deep furrows of tears. And still, in the same imploring tone, she said: —

“Oh! will you let me see Louise?”



Without looking at her, still pursuing his way, he replied: —

“ Louise believes you are dead.”

He divined, rather than saw, that she had stood still, as he uttered the words. Without knowing where he was going, he turned into the carriage road which traversed the length of the Park. There was a sound of sobbing behind him. Nearer and nearer it drew, and he realized that she had overtaken him once more.

“ Then you will never forgive me? ”

He shook his head and walked on relentlessly.

Night had come.

“ Then I shall never see Louise again? ”

He walked straight ahead.

The rain continued; a fine, cold, penetrating drizzle.

“ Never? ” pleaded Claudia’s voice in the distance.

On he went without a pause.

The Park was utterly deserted now.

“ Louis! ”

He stopped. This was too much. He was



losing his reason. He thought he felt his throat contract as if to prevent his heart from rising to his lips. He turned and stared into the night. No voice called him now. He fancied he could discern the silhouette of a woman climbing the parapet of the bridge. He moved towards that vaguely-outlined form. He was weeping now, a burning, endless rain of tears. He walked rapidly towards that vanishing shadow.

Oh! Eighteen years of love, of peace, of happiness! Could they be destroyed in one single hour?

The silhouette seemed to run along the wall. He started to run in his turn, in the same direction. Oh! did the human code of morals exact it? Must those eighteen years of felicity be eternally forgotten? Must it be eternally remembered — that single hour of shame? Oh! she who had loved him so! She who had given him Louise. And he could have effaced these things from his memory, could have banished them from his heart!

“Claudia!” he moaned, as he sped faster



and faster in pursuit, "Oh! my Claudia of old!"

And then he thought he saw the silhouette spring suddenly into the night. Then, as he looked again, with troubled eyes, he saw that the whole line of the wall was deserted.

"Claudia!" he called in anguish.

No one answered. On the other side of the wall the trees of the Park formed a great, dark shadow. There was no one there.

With anxious eyes he ran along the lonely Boulevard, occasionally stopping for a second to listen, and at last reached a place where he could leave the road and reach the gully below.

He turned to the left, breathing hard. He hesitated, and, groping his way, descended into the darkness, traversed rapidly, though with difficulty, the length of the high wall, opening wide his frightened eyes.

"Claudia!" he called in a gentle voice.

It was very dark, and he stumbled over the rough ground.

"Claudia!"

He thought he heard a cry . . . a distant



cry . . . He hurried on. The cry seemed to cease at his approach.

"Claudia! Claudia!" he called, choking with sobs.

And then a feeble voice answered him:—

"Louis . . ."

He went towards that voice; he heard his own sobs making sonorous echoes in the night. He hastened his steps, staggering like a drunken man. There, lying motionless beneath the bridge, he discovered a dark form.

"Oh! my poor child! my poor, poor child!" he moaned, falling on his knees beside the body.

And taking her hands in his, he bent over the face of the mother of Louise.

"Oh! my Claudia, I forgive you!" he murmured brokenly, his breast shaken with sobs.

"Louis!" was all she said.

She drew him towards her, painfully, with her left arm, and they wept for a moment, unable to speak.

Claudia could not move her limbs. She had broken her spine in her fall.



With her still loving hands she clung to her husband's neck.

"Louis, dear . . . as my Louise believes I am dead . . . hide everything from her. Let her think that I have been attacked by thieves . . . and that they threw me over the wall. Then take all the money out of my purse; the police will find me here, and our little girl will be told that I was the victim . . . of an assault."

She could no longer speak; she was suffering agonies. She uttered one last supreme cry, pressed her husband's hand convulsively, and looked at him with wide-open eyes, where even now there lurked the shadow of death.

And still she found strength to murmur: —

"Will you kiss me . . . once? . . . Good-by, Louis. Say nothing to Louise . . . nothing . . . to my baby —."

THE END



# The Lure of the Flame

*By* MARK DANGER

---

---

The tale has been told in other books, like "My Little Sister," and in many pamphlets and from many platforms, but never told with the poignancy Mark Danger gives it. Nobody can be unmoved by its terrible significance. A very remarkable literary achievement, for it touches pitch boldly, forcibly, without shrinking, yet is not defiled.

**Price \$1.25 net; Postage 12 Cents**

---

---

**The Macaulay Company, *Publishers***

**15 West 38th Street**

**New York**



# ROMANCE

A Novel by ACTON DAVIES

*From Edward Sheldon's Play*

*Fully Illustrated*

---

---

Filled to overflowing with the Emotional Glamor of Love, "Romance" is the Romance of a Famous Grand Opera Singer and a Young Clergyman. Despite their different callings they are drawn together by a profound and sincere love. But the woman has drained the cup of life so deeply that her marriage to the Minister is impossible. In the hour of trial she rises to sublime heights of self-denial, proving herself stronger than the man.

"Scores a sensational hit."—*N. Y. Evening Sun.*

*Price \$1.25 net; Postage 12 Cents*

---

---

**The Macaulay Company, Publishers**

15 West 38th Street

New York



# THE WHIP

By RICHARD PARKER

NOVELIZED FROM CECIL RALEIGH'S GREAT ENGLISH MELODRAMA OF THE SAME NAME

---

---

The story that has thrilled London for two solid years now appears in America for the first time, giving a true picture of the notorious entanglements in which the British sporting nobility are often involved. But in spite of the intrigue and fraud practiced by Capt. Sartoris and his adventuress friend the story ends the way you wish it to. Critics all agree that "THE WHIP" contains more thrills to the page than any other novel published for years.

*Beautifully illustrated with pictures of real people, as they appear in the play.*

**Price \$1.25 net; Postage 12 Cents**

---

---

**The Macaulay Company, Publishers**

**15 West 38th Street**

**New York**



# A WORLD OF WOMEN

*By* J. D. BERESFORD

---

What would be the result if nearly all the men in the world were suddenly exterminated?

The author has conceived an amazing situation, which he works out to a surprising finish.

A most important contribution to ultra-modern literature.

Price \$1.35 net; Postage 12 Cents

---

**The Macaulay Company, *Publishers***

**15 West 38th Street**

**New York**



# DAYBREAK

A ROMANTIC NOVEL

*By the Author of "HIGH NOON"*

---

A story of the Balkans, this is one of the timely novels of the year. The plot deals with a highly interesting love affair between a young English diplomat and a Russian grand duchess. In her previous book the author proved her ability to strike a popular note which she has not lost.

**Price \$1.25 net; Postage 10 Cents**

---

**The Macaulay Company, *Publishers***

**15 West 38th Street**

**New York**



# The Indiscretion of Lady Usher

*By the Author of*  
"THE DIARY OF MY HONEYMOON"

---

This story is a Sequel to "The Diary of My Honeymoon," one of the most readable books we have ever published. "The Indiscretion of Lady Usher" is written in the same intimate style that has made famous all the writings of the unknown author and we predict a startling success for it. The book will make you burn the midnight oil.

Price \$1.25 net; Postage 10 Cents

---

The Macaulay Company, *Publishers*  
15 West 38th Street New York







Deacidified using the Bookkeeper pro  
Neutralizing Agent: Magnesium Oxide  
Treatment Date:



AUG

199

BOOKKEEPER







